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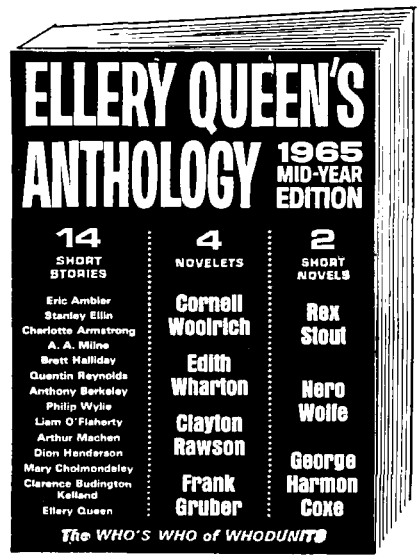

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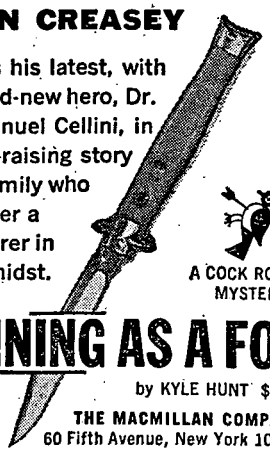

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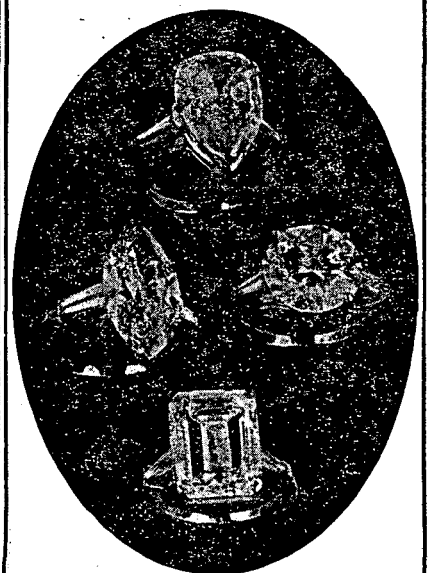

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the *NEWEST* novelet by

CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

How Toby and Ann Hartman went to a lovely, deserted Mexican beach for a week-end of fishing, and how they took a friend of Toby's along with them—well, he wasn't really a friend . . . and what happened after that has become almost a legend of our time, almost folklore . . .

PROTECTOR OF TRAVELERS

by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

SHE CRAWLED OUT OF HER SLEEPing bag and from under the half tent they had rigged to keep the sand from blowing into their faces—and also, Ann thought, to provide at least a token privacy.

She didn't much like having a third person along—this man from Toby's office, whom she barely knew. She had no reason to dislike him—not really. He was just an amiable man who liked fishing. He performed his share of the chores, cheerfully, and he behaved very well. But. It would have been so much more fun to have slept out of doors and awakened this long week-end on this lovely deserted Mexican beach, just the two of them, Toby and Ann Hartman, a man and his wife.

We can't really play or have fun, she thought resentfully; we can't act as young and silly as we still know how to be. This third person, Byron Reynolds, was a kind of anchor to their upper-middle-class-American civilization; he was a drag on their spirits.

Toby had said, "Look, honey, he wants to come with us so bad. He's older than we are, and I don't think he goes fishing much any more. But he won't be any bother. Do you mind?"

"If he's willing to leave at midnight," she had said, "and drive all night, the way we're going to do."

"He's willing and eager. He's got to be at this stupid Company dinner, too. So you can pick us both up, downtown. He'll bring his stuff over here the night before, and we'll just light out, the way we planned. It's kind of wild, down there," Toby had added. "Another man along might not be such a bad idea."

So Ann had agreed. She was no outdoor girl, except as Toby's de-

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voted pupil and follower. There could be crises that she was not prepared to meet. Maybe, she had thought, it isn't such a bad idea.

Now, she thought, it *was* a bad idea and Toby knows it, too. Oh, well, they were stuck with it.

Toby was a tuft of brown beloved hair in the shadow. Byron Reynolds was a motionless lump in a tan sleeping bag, over there. Meanwhile, here was Ann, the only soul awake in this dawn which was beautiful enough to make you bawl, if you didn't watch out.

Ann stretched her body in the heavy knit pants and top that she wore night and day, which was, in the circumstances, more decent than otherwise. What now? she asked herself, knowing that she couldn't bear this wild beauty for very long at a time. She would remember it forever, of course. But now—make up a fire? Put the coffee on?

The coffee can was on the tailboard of their station wagon, parked farther up the beach, on the margin where some tough grass grew. She stripped off the socks she had worn to bed and felt the cold sand lump under her insteps and slip and slide away. One more hot shining day. One more cold pale night. One more dawn. She kept her head down and filled the coffee pot from the water barrel, dumped the coffee in, and began to slog across the sand to where they had made a fire place.

Toby was up and stretching.

"Early bird," she yelled.

"*Good* morning, worm," he yelled back, grinning. Ann had never been a dawn fancier. Oh, she was going to be kidded when they got home.

She struggled toward the circle of stones, carefully not looking at the tan sleeping bag that was beside her path, expecting Byron Reynolds to sit up and greet her. But he did not stir when she passed, and Ann was glad.

She was arranging the little sticks and the big sticks, kneeling on the chilly sand, anticipating the dear sharp heat, absorbed, and at the moment rather blissfully happy, when Toby touched her.

She smiled up. "Hi."

"Look, Annie." He squatted beside her. "Something's kind of wrong, I'm afraid."

"What?"

"Trouble." His eyes sent the trouble straight into hers. "I think," her husband said, "Byron must have passed out in the night. He seems to be dead, Annie."

Ann panicked. There was nothing else to call it—she just panicked.

They sat on the sand, several yards away from the body. It was a body. There was no doubt at all about that.

Ann said, "Toby, I *can't*. I just

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can't. I know I'm panicking, but I'm going to have to walk right out on this. Y-y-you've—" her teeth chattered—"heard stories about Mexican jails. What if they don't believe us? And I don't see why they should. I mean, we're Americans. I've read about Americans who have just a little traffic accident down here and who can't get a lawyer or even find out why they're being held. They can't even get a doctor. They just lie in their blood in some dirty jail. And we don't know anybody. We can't even speak the language. We might not even be able to get in touch with anybody in the United States. Toby, I'm scared—plain scared!"

His eyes winced.

"They say it takes money, lots of money," she babbled on. "B-bribes, and all that. Listen, I don't know if what they say is true or not, but that's what I've read in the newspapers. And what if we were locked up, not knowing how to *ever* get out, and not being together? I would go out of my mind, Toby, right straight up the wall. I'm sorry, honey—you married a coward. But I'd better not kid either one of us. I'm absolutely terrified!"

Toby's face was somber. "Yeah," he said. "Me, too."

Then there was no sound but the surf. A few gulls wheeled by. The sun was up now, full gold. Not another soul had appeared on the horizon. Yet.

"Wh-what h-happened to him?" she chattered.

"I don't know. When I looked over there I just knew something was wrong."

He shrugged in despair. "You could take the station wagon, Ann."

"No! I won't leave you," she wailed. "I can't do that, *either*."

"Honey, if you could get across, into San Diego, you'd be able to stir people up—in case there *was* trouble."

"What can Americans do in this country, to protect us?"

"Something, I guess," he answered gloomily. "I'll admit I am only guessing."

"Toby, we don't even *know* the laws down here. They're not going to be like ours. For us, there would have to be an autopsy—to prove what did happen. But do they have a law like that? And if they do hold the—I mean, him—oh, poor Mrs. Reynolds! Could we at least find a telephone and call somebody on the other side of the border before we . . . Could we get a lawyer to find us a lawyer down here? Maybe I wouldn't be s-so s-scared."

Toby looked at her shuddering wretchedness and said abruptly, "Let's go. Start packing the stuff. Just take it easy, but *do* it." His arm was tight around her shoulders. Ann's heart was racing. "Now, don't worry," Toby said

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grimly. "We're not going to leave him."

"We couldn't do that, *either,*" cried Ann.

"He's an American, too," said Toby. "So we'll go home, all of us."

Ann sat beside him as he drove north, proceeding very carefully, very soberly, and heavy, heavy over their heads hung the body of Byron Reynolds, swathed in both tent canvasses, stretched between fishing rods, disguised beside the rolled-up sleeping bags on the roof of the station wagon, along the ski rack.

Toby had done all the bad part of the packing. He said that a body in a sleeping bag looked too much like a body. He thought the roof would be safer. It would look as if they had a large tent up there.

Inside the station wagon was all their other gear—suitcases, camp icebox, water barrel, utensils, and their food supplies. Bathing suits flapped at one window. Near another hung the clear plastic bags with their civilized costumes inside of them—Ann's green silk suit, in case they had gone to dinner somewhere, although she wasn't fond of foreign food, and ridiculously, in the other two plastic bags, the dress suits the two men had worn to the Company dinner that now seemed long, long ago, in another world.

Ann was bracing herself for the border inspection. She began to believe that they would get that far without any trouble. She knew the routine there. The check was usually perfunctory—unless something aroused the well-trained but mysterious instincts of the men who would or would not let them through. The Mexicans would probably just wave them by—it was the Americans who would check. But they had to get past both. Or be caught in some No Man's Land between? Ann trembled.

You are, she told herself, a fun-loving young American wife, dirty but happy, and glad to be getting home to your own tiled bathroom. Toby is a sports-loving young American husband who didn't catch any fish to speak of, but who enjoyed trying. We wish everybody well and we expect to be wished well in return. And there are just the two of us. Keep remembering that—there are just the two of us.

Her hands were moist. But if the Inspectors looked hard enough to notice there are two dinner jackets and all the trimmings in two of the transparent garment bags . . . Her hands slipped around each other. Few men took even one on a fishing trip. No one man took two. But she wouldn't mention this to Toby. Too late to do anything about it now.

Toby said, "If you keep on looking the way you do, Annie, we would do better to stop at the Police Station on this side, before we

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make more trouble for ourselves."

"I know," she said. "I won't . . . I'll be all right."

"Think about something else."

"All right."

There was a St. Christopher Medal magnetized to the dashboard. Ann Hartman said to it, silently, "Protector of Travelers, tell me what to think about and what to do with my hands."

They were coming into Tijuana, somnolent at this hour. Toby's hands looked normal on the wheel. I am a girl, Ann suddenly thought. She took up her handbag and got out her compact and lipstick. They trundled quietly through the town while she dabbed at her face.

All the while, in countercurrent, her thoughts ran to Mrs. Reynolds, the widowed woman. What will there be to comfort her? There will be me, to say that he was happy yesterday. Will she believe me? Do I believe me? I never took the trouble to know the man, or to know if he was happy.

Now they were in the plaza leading to the border. There was no traffic; there would be no delay. Ann slipped the blue scarf off her head and shook out her hair. The station wagon came demurely to a stop and the Mexicans on duty waved it on.

Now the gate to the United States of America. Ann put the scarf on her head and crossed the ends under her chin. When it was her turn to lean forward, to look past Toby at the big American and tell where she was born, she was holding the scarf's ends taut in her hands, and she managed to achieve her normal air of semi-mischievous query. And how do you know I'm not a spy or a smuggler?

She must have done it perfectly. The Inspector was not amused by this girlish attitude. He saw it often and was never amused, by people who did not really believe in crime or have any notion what his job was. With a stony face he waved the station wagon through.

It seemed to Ann as if she could feel the Bill of Rights settling cosily down all around them. She sighed her relief. The people of the United States were up and about on their way to work. There was traffic.

Toby drove on, as carefully and as rigidly as before. Then Ann saw a great drop of perspiration spring out of his hair line and start down toward his brow. She whipped off her scarf and gently blotted it away.

Toby sighed, "So far, so good."

So far? But aren't we home, she thought. Where we understand and will be understood.

Some miles farther, he suddenly turned the wheel, with his right leg convulsing oddly, and the station wagon bumped into a dusty parking lot at the side of a small diner. Toby managed to set the brake, then he tumbled out on his

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side, putting his right foot to the ground and massaging the calf. Ann got out and ran around to him.

"Cramp. Oo-ow. And a doosy, too. Tension, I guess."

"I can drive."

He glanced upward. "No, no. Look, why don't we get some coffee?" He was looking rather fiercely reckless. "We've got some figuring to do, anyhow."

What figuring? she wondered. But he began to limp toward the diner and she followed.

When they were inside, the pain took hold of him and a woman, evidently the proprietress, rolled nervous eyes. "Just a cramp," Toby reassured her. "Can we get some breakfast?"

"Why, sure thing." She led them to a booth in the rear which was dim and smelled of yesterday's potatoes.

But the coffee was marvelous.

"What now?" said Toby after a while, when the pain creases had gone from his face.

"I thought—" Ann didn't finish. She realized that she hadn't been thinking. When Toby had said home, she had imagined he meant their home town.

He read her mind. "Uh uh. Not two hundred more miles—not the way we're loaded." (No, of course not.) "I think San Diego," he went on. "And someone in authority, you know?"

He meant the police. Ann nodded.

"But what about his wife? Ann, what would *you* want?"

Ann tried to turn a sympathetic imagination toward an answer. She could dimly remember how Ethel Reynolds looked—middle-aged spread, pink jowls, twists of pale hair. Poor woman—Ann did not really know her, knew nothing about her temperament. "I think," she finally answered, "that she will be glad we have done what we've done."

"Should we call her? Right away?"

Ann said, "I guess we should."

Toby leaned out of the booth, massaging his leg where it was stretched out into the aisle. "Not much privacy here. Phone's on the wall."

"Not here, then. One of those outdoor booths?"

"Okay. See, I can't quite figure what to do with the—the package."

"But won't the—the authorities . . . ?"

"Yes, but do we drive up with it? To a police station? Or to some hospital?"

"I don't see—"

"Or would she want—a regular place?"

The conversation was awkward, when they could not speak aloud about a dead body or a funeral parlor.

"We should ask *her* that," Ann said.

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Toby sighed, "One more cup."

Ann studied the plane of his cheek, the touch of gauntness. She was beginning to think that she *was* a girl, and a stupid one, at that. She not only didn't know the answers, she didn't know the questions.

Except one. "What will happen to us?" she asked softly.

"I don't know." Their eyes met. "Wish I could keep you out of it," Toby said. "It wasn't your decision."

"It was my necessity, Toby." Ann was woman enough and bright enough to know that much. "Did we break a law?"

"We don't know," Toby said, "but ignorance is no excuse. Well, we'd better get going."

At the cash register the proprietress inquired about his leg and Toby said it seemed to be functioning properly now. He left the money and the Hartmans went outside.

The station wagon was not where they had left it.

It was not in the parking lot at all.

It was gone.

Toby's hand was painful on Ann's shoulder. They whirled and went back inside. "Did you see anybody drive off with my gray station wagon?" he demanded.

"What? What's that?" When the meaning of the question finally got through to the woman's understanding, she became agitated. So did one of the customers of the place, a barrel-chested man in working clothes, with a disreputable felt hat pulled to a pixie peak on his head.

"Hey, *I* saw a gray station wagon, backing out. Didn't know it was yours, Mister. I wasn't here when you parked it. Hey, you better call the cops right away. They're pretty sharp, you know. They'll get right on it."

Now the proprietress was pointing to the phone on the wall. "That's right. You do that, Mister."

The Hartmans realized that they could not *not* do that.

Toby gave Ann a look, then went to the phone, with the proprietress beside him, holding a dime ready, helpful, insistent, full of faith in the power of the police to protect the innocent. They were just within the city limits. So Toby called the San Diego police.

Ann stood there, paralysed. What would Toby say? What *could* he say?

Very quietly, steadily, he reported a stolen car. He gave the location of the diner, prompted by the proprietress. He described the station wagon, gave the license number, said that it was loaded with camping equipment. He gave their names and their home address in Santa Barbara. Finally, he said, "We'll try to get into town and find a hotel. I'll call you back from there." He thanked somebody and hung up.

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He had not mentioned a dead body—but he looked ghastly.

The customer was dancing up and down on his pointed shoes. "Hey, listen, folks, I'm going into town. You can ride along with me. You're perfectly welcome. Okay?"

"That's mighty nice of you," Toby said tiredly.

So they went outside, and Toby and Ann got into the back seat of an old Ford. The man coaxed it into motion and told them his name was Donahue, that he was a plasterer. It was a crime there was so much crime these days. It was these punk kids. Now that he came to think about it, he was pretty sure that a couple of kids had taken the wagon. Now, he didn't know exactly why he thought so. Skinny legs in tight jeans—he remembered that much. Memory was a funny thing, wasn't it? And so on and so on.

Ann could not speak and Toby spoke as little as possible. He gave Donahue the name of a hotel. On arrival, Toby thanked him and said, yes they had his name and address, as a witness.

Mr. Donahue, rolling his eyes at the great canopy over the sidewalk, began to backtrack. "Say, folks, listen, I don't think I could identify nobody. Not really. I just got this impression, you know what I mean? It's not going to be too much help, you know what I mean? Look, I'll do my duty and all, but I wasn't paying *that* much attention."

"We understand," Ann said to him. Mr. Donahue gave her a look of sadness and drove away.

So Toby, in his old flannel shirt and dirty suntans, and Ann, in her rumpled suit of slacks and soiled shirt, walked past the doorman into the dim and elegant old lobby. But Toby had stayed here many times before, and when the manager came out, Toby gave him a quiet explanation that went no further than "fishing trip, stolen car and luggage." The manager allowed the stern look on his face to dissolve toward service and personally led them to their room.

As soon as he was gone, Ann threw herself down on the lush mattress. Toby said quickly, warningly, "We probably are in no more trouble than we already were, Annie. Go wash up, why don't you? I'm going to call Ethel Reynolds. Then we'll trot around to the police station."

"Yes," said Ann calmly. She went into the luxurious bathroom and put her hands into hot water. She washed her face and neck and she combed her hair. She tugged at her shapeless garments and held her body so that the slacks and shirt fell into smarter lines. She was feeling stunned by everything that was happening, including the fact that her husband had obviously expected her to lie down on the bed and have a girlish cry.

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When she came back into the room, Toby said, "I've decided to call her from the station. She'll probably want to talk to them too."

"It would be bad enough to have to tell her if we knew her," Ann said.

"Or worse," he said.

They took a cab. Toby had not been able to shave, since everything was in the suitcases in the station wagon; but he had washed and neatened his hair.

They entered the Headquarters building and asked where to report the theft of a body. They endured, with what calm they could muster, a series of hard-eyed stares, and at last found themselves in an office with a man in a gray suit who told them his name was Larson.

Toby told the story, sparing nothing. At the end, before the man could comment, Toby added quickly, "Now, I ought to call his wife. I really ought. I've chickened out on that long enough."

Larson nodded and pushed a phone toward Toby.

Ann sat in a chair and clasped her hands, thinking, I can't seem to help at all. I can't do any of these awful things. Toby has to do them. If it wasn't for me, he'd have got in touch with the Mexican police. And who knows? It might have turned out all right. Who knows?

She listened to Toby struggling to tell a woman gently that her husband was suddenly and mysteriously dead, that his body had been smuggled across the border, and then stolen. The poor woman must have said that she didn't understand, because Toby, with almost superhuman patience, began to go all through it again.

After that, Toby looked at Larson with such despair that the detective extended his hand for the phone. He went through it the third time, in a somewhat less hesitant manner.

When, at last, the connection was broken, the understanding was that Ethel Reynolds would come to San Diego at once. The Hartmans were to reserve a hotel room for her and wait for her.

Now Toby sat, exhausted, while Larson used the phone again. After a brief mention of a dead man he went through a series of "I see," "Okay," and "Right." Then he put down the phone and faced them.

"Your car has been found," he told them watchfully.

"Oh." Ann rose. At least, this was a little better.

"There is no dead body on the roof of your station wagon," Larson said quietly.

Toby and Ann simply stared at him.

"We had better go," the police officer said. "Come with me."

So they rode, with Larson, in a dark sedan, out of the city and back along the road by which they had entered San Diego. They soon

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stopped asking questions to which there were no answers.

The station wagon was parked about a mile past the diner. It was cluttered and dusty, with the canvas of one of the half tents hanging down over the side. The fishing rods were still there, and one of the sleeping bags was on the roof.

But there was no body.

Not in the station wagon or on top of it.

A police car was there, and uniformed men greeted Larson with deference. They had spotted the station wagon by its description and the license number. There it had stood—but no prints, no clues. Nothing for the police to work on.

Ann and Toby were standing on the sidewalk, hand in hand. Larson beckoned. "See what else is missing," he suggested.

Toby said, "One of the canvases from the roof, and two sleeping bags. And—you know—"

"Anything *else*, is what I'm asking," snapped Larson.

So Toby put his head in over the lowered tailgate. "Hard to say . . . Nothing, as far as I can tell."

Ann slipped under his arm to look in. Her green silk suit gleamed dimly inside its plastic bag. "Could we please take our clothes?" she asked Larson. "We haven't got a stitch to change into."

"Lift those suitcases out."

Toby lifted them out, his tan leather and her blue nylon. He did not touch Reynolds' black bag.

"Open them," said Larson.

Toby opened them on the tailboard. Ann's pink slip, her high heels, the old skirt and sweater she had jammed in, were exposed. Larson stirred the contents of both cases with a hand he used as if it were a stick. "All right," he said, "take them, but nothing else. In view of your story about this dead man, we'll have to impound the car."

He left them and seemed to be giving instructions.

Ann, standing on the sidewalk, began to cry. Very silently, not to disturb anybody, she let the tears roll down. It seemed so sad that a man should have died and been treated with such indignity as to have been lost, like an old shoe, the one old shoe that lies beside the road, so mysteriously, with the shape of a living foot still in it.

Larson came back, gave her tears a hard look that dried them instantly, herded the Hartmans into his sedan, and drove them back to the hotel. He went up to the room with them. In the incongruous elegance they all sat down.

Larson said, "Maybe they had a notion to go camping. They wired across your ignition and took off. They start to look over the loot, and find the dead man. They realize they've got a hot car. Abandon it. But there are people who are superstitiously unwilling to handle a dead body. So the body

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will turn up somewhere else—in some out-of-the-way spot."

Larson shrugged. "They couldn't have gone too far before they started to unload, that's for sure. So we'll look around and we'll find it. That is if—"

He became bland. "Now, this Byron Reynolds was a business associate of yours, you say, Mr. Hartman?"

"I said we worked in the same office."

"How well did you know him?"

"Not too well. Nice fellow, but older than I am. Went to lunch a few times. Very casually. Never entertained him and his wife socially. Ann—I mean, Mrs. Hartman—barely knew them."

"How much did you know Mr. Reynolds, Mrs. Hartman?" The detective's eyes were cold.

"I'd met him and his wife at the Company parties, only once or twice," she said.

"He was—did you say, in his early forties? Did you ever meet him anywhere alone? Mrs. Hartman?"

"What?" said Ann, not understanding until Toby drew air in, sharply.

"I ask the questions," Larson said, "that I have to ask. Any trouble between you and Reynolds in a business way, Hartman? Rivalry? Grudges? Office politics?"

"No," said Toby shortly. "He liked to fish. He wanted to go in the worst way, so I felt sorry for him. And that's all there was to it. What are *you* thinking? There'll be an autopsy, won't there?"

"Not without a body," Larson reminded them.

"You'll find it."

"We'll do our best—and that's pretty good, don't forget it." Larson seemed to be giving them warning. "If we don't, I may have to do a little more wondering. Now, you say you came over the border with a body on the roof of your car. Suppose you didn't? Suppose the man died down there in Mexico and his death could be, shall we say, embarrassing to you? So you bury him in the sand. Or somewhere. Then you panic. Run. Now, you are home free. Why? Because we can look for the body on this side as long as we like, but we can't find what isn't there. Can we?"

Toby said sharply, "We stole our own car? Ask the woman in the diner. Ask Mr. Donahue."

"I don't say you stole your own car," said Larson calmly. "I just wonder if, given the fact that it just *happened* to get stolen, you didn't very cleverly improvise a little?"

"That's pretty wild," said Toby stiffly.

"It would be a coincidence?" Larson grinned at them. "It already is. And so is everything else you've told me. No, it looks as if you bury him and run and get away with it.

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But where is he? People are going to want to know. Pretty smart if we look for him here instead of where he really is."

"You flatter us," said Toby with bitter anger.

"I kind of hope we'll find that body pretty soon," Larson said. "Time doesn't help any of us, very much. Meanwhile, we'll be checking." And he left abruptly.

Toby turned around, looking wild. "Now what? Now he is going to be checking on us, up home. Now come all the nasty questions. All over the office. All over the neighborhood. Among our friends. Questions about me. Questions about you."

"I know," Ann said. She thought that no matter what the answers are, the questions alone are going to be a mark on us, forever. "Well," she said brightly, "maybe the sky is falling, but this chicken-little is going to have a bath, and you had better take one, too. Then we'll go down and have a super-civilized luncheon with all the fixings."

"While we can, eh?" Toby was trying as hard as she to grin and be gay.

So they tried. But they were not as young as they had been yesterday, and any playfulness was much too close to hysteria. Ann, in the old sweater and skirt, felt like the proverbial condemned criminal.

They were paged. Santa Barbara calling. Mrs. Reynolds was prostrated and under a doctor's care. Her lawyer, a Mr. Bixler, was on his way and would the Hartmans please put the hotel room in his name? The Hartmans did.

Toby bought a large scale map of the city. They went up to the room where he pored over it and Ann stared at the wall.

"Listen, Annie, I've been figuring the times involved. Do you realize that this thief or thieves had the car for only about one hour, maybe less? The body has to be near that diner."

"That's what Mr. Larson was saying, isn't it? But you can drive an awful long way in one hour."

"Not and get back to a mile from where you started."

"You can drive pretty far in even half an hour."

"I don't think he did."

"Why not?"

"Well, look at it this way. Suppose he drove half an hour as far as he could go? Why the devil would he turn around and come back at all? Why not leave the car half an hour out?"

"Oh," she said.

"Look where it was found. About a mile the *other side* of the diner."

"So?"

"So I say he first took it the other way—*this* side of the diner. Donahue didn't see which way he drove off. Now, figure that the thief panics. He has to get rid of the car. He doesn't leave it where it is. Now,

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don't tell me he drove it about a mile, stopped on a busy thoroughfare, and removed a body there."

"No."

"Then he wanted to get it away from the place where he *first* took it. So he turns around and just after he passes the diner—about a mile after—he loses his nerve."

"But—"

"I deduce," said Toby, "that he has a safe place of his own not far *this* side of the diner. Come on, we're going to rent some transportation."

"Will they let us?"

"We'll find out as soon as we try."

"Oh, it was all my fault, Toby. I'm sorry."

"Hey, none of that," he said. "It was not your fault that Byron died. It was not your fault that a thief or thieves came along. It was not even your fault that *I* drove over the border. Nothing is that simple, Annie." He was looking at her intently. "Wouldn't you rather go than sit here?"

"I sure would," she said. And they left the hotel, arm in arm.

Nobody stopped them from renting a car, although it was obvious that someone was following them. A dark car with a single man in it. But Toby shrugged him off as they started on their search.

Just before reaching the diner, they began to cruise up and down the streets of a straggly neighborhood, a poor section—a hodgepodge of small dwellings, a few shops, gas stations, and small unprosperous-looking warehouses, standing among weeds and rubbishy vacant lots. They noticed many Mexican faces. Then they began to see the uniforms: the police were here too.

"I guess they also thought of it," Toby said glumly.

They thought of it, mused Ann, and now the police will simply look. In every weed patch, in every gully, in every rubbish heap. Very simple, that way—but it takes time.

She wished, as much as Toby did, that they could somehow cut the search short. Was there anything more to deduce? Any good guesses? We are innocent travelers, she thought—at least, we were. Now, in the clutch of these circumstances, is there nothing at all that we can do to protect ourselves?

She said aloud, "St. Christopher sure didn't do much for us, did he?"

"Hold on," said Toby sharply. "None of that, Annie."

But she smiled at him. "Don't worry about me, Toby. I'm not going to break down."

"Good girl," he murmured.

A moment later he stopped their rented car in front of another diner. "We can't do what the cops are doing. And what else we can do doesn't occur to me. No point in just riding around. Come on, let's take a coffee break."

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He smiled at her, helping her out.

They paid no heed to the dark car that pulled up and parked behind them, but went into the place which at this hour of the afternoon seemed deserted. It was, however, a popular place. There was an enormous juke box and the tables were well-scarred. The establishment bore, in fact, the raffish air of a neighborhood gathering spot, by night.

The man behind the counter was small, plump, smiling, and a born host. He rested on his pink-shirted elbows and was obviously glad to see them. "Say, you folks notice all them police cars around?" he said at once. "I guess they're after somebody in the neighborhood. What do you know?" He was a born gossip, a man who liked human companionship.

Toby did not volunteer what they knew. But Ann, pulling up her wits and her spirits by a kind of prayer within herself, said, "What kind of neighborhood is this?"

"Oh, it's a crazy mixed-up neighborhood, all right, ma'am. But not too bad. People just kinda come in all kinds, you know how it is. I'd sure like to know what's up, though. Well, meanwhile, what can I do for you good people?"

He exuded a keen curiosity and an enveloping good will. Ann felt that he wasn't missing a thing about them—their status in life, their relationship with each other, or their common aura of discouraged anxiety.

She said, "I'll bet you know everything about everybody who lives around here."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," he objected, but not at all displeased. "I'm kinda interested in people, you know? I will say I never get lonely. Now, what can I do for you good people?" he repeated, with curious emphasis.

Ann had a strange sensation of leaping off an edge, of suddenly rising, on wings, from solid ground.

"I think I'll tell you," she said. "Will you please show us how to find a young man who lives around here, who hasn't very much money, who wears jeans, who plays an instrument, or perhaps he sings, or both, who is pretty good at it, almost a professional, who has a friend, a buddy he always runs around with . . . ?"

Toby was staring at her. She felt like staring at herself.

The man behind the counter looked thoughtful, then said, "You mean Eddie Rodgers, I guess."

"Do I?" said Ann.

"Americanized his name—lots of them do, you know. Yeah, he's really pretty clever on the guitar. Probably he'll get places. Lives with his Mom and his sister. Old man Rodriguez died three or four years ago, right after he got his family into the States. Well, Josephina does the best she can, but I

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wouldn't say they was rich. Oh, the kid Eddie will get his break one of these days. This buddy he's got, though, this Cliff Something-or-other, he comes from somewhere else. I only seen him about two or three times, but he looks to me like he's got nobody in back of him. Know what I mean?" The little counterman looked sorry.

Ann had her breath back. "Where does this Eddie live?"

"Why, he lives right down this street—say, three blocks. I can't give you the number. And they ain't got no phone." Ann stirred. "But listen," the man said, "there's been a death. I mean, Ysobel, that's the daughter, she comes here and calls the priest, only a little bit ago."

Toby's mouth had fallen open but Ann could speak. "Do you know who died?"

"No, Ma'am, I really don't. Ysobel, she was upset, I could see that. Thing of it is, there's no older man *to* die—not in that family."

As Ann slipped off her stool, and Toby from his, the little man's face began to fall. He would miss them. So Ann cried out to him, "We'll be back and tell you all about it. I absolutely promise you."

The little man took this strange speech exactly as she had meant it. He beamed on her.

Outside, Ann said, "I could see my green suit in the plastic bag. But the dinner clothes—yours and Mr. Reynolds'—were gone. I remembered they were gone!"

"But who would steal a dinner jacket?"

"A bridegroom. A waiter. Someone who works at night. Say, an entertainer. That's why I said someone who plays an instrument, or maybe sings."

"We ought to tell the police," Toby had her arm and they were almost running.

"The police," she panted, "are right behind us."

They hurried, counting off three blocks, and the policeman from the dark car followed them. Then they saw the priest, standing in the weedy front yard of a very small house, talking to a dark-haired young girl. Ann ran up the path, with Toby behind her and the policeman trailing.

"Yes? Please?" The dark-haired girl rolled huge frightened eyes.

The priest said to Ann, gently, "Perhaps you don't realize there is a death here."

Ann said, "Father, do you know the deceased? Is he one of your own people?"

The priest shook his head. His intuition was very strong. "Perhaps you can help us."

"Please?" Ann looked at the girl who began to cry.

An older woman had come to the open door, and the priest spoke to her in Spanish. With a cool, proud look the woman inclined her head, inviting them in.

They all trooped through a neat front room, past the blank eye of a

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TV set, into a dim bedroom where, on an immaculate white spread, with his limbs straightened, his eyes decently closed, his waxen face peaceful, and dressed decorously in his own dinner clothes, Byron Reynolds lay between tall candles . . .

It was a good while later that Ann and Toby came back to the diner, as they had promised they would.

Their little friend in the pink shirt was a marvelous listener.

"Looks like," Toby began to wind it up, "the kids wanted the dinner clothes most, but decided to take the whole car. When they got it out of sight, in back of Eddie's house, they started to poke around, found the body, and were scared out of their wits. They rushed off with the car, leaving the body. They wouldn't touch it, but Josephina and her daughter—they have respect for the dead." Toby swallowed.

Ann took up the tale. "Josephina couldn't bring herself to betray her son as a car thief—that's how the priest translated it. But she did what she considered most important, what she knew to be the right and absolutely necessary thing. She laid Mr. Reynolds out and she prayed for his soul." Ann swallowed.

Toby said, "The priest was having a hard time explaining the law to her—about a death certificate and everything."

"Uh *huh*," said their friend. "Found Eddie, did they?"

"Hiding in the shed. His buddy is not long for the streets either," Toby said. "I don't want to press charges, not against Eduardo." Toby was gloomy. "I mean, on account of his mother."

"Do Eddie all the good in the world to be punished for a stunt like that," said their friend.

"His mother doesn't think so, but—well, we just couldn't."

"You people going to get into any trouble?" The man poured more coffee.

"Mrs. Reynolds' lawyer got here," Toby told him, "and he says that if the autopsy shows natural causes, then there'll be no trouble. But that's what it has to say—we know, we were there. So the Mexicans will shrug, Mr. Bixler thinks, since Bryon was not one of their nationals and no crime was committed in Mexico."

"It's the Americans who are mad at us," Ann continued, "for getting him across the border the way we did. But—especially if Mrs. Reynolds is grateful—I guess we'll just get our wrists slapped." Nevertheless, Ann sounded downhearted.

"So?" said their friend softly, not missing their state of depression.

"I felt like giving Eddie my dinner jacket," Toby burst out, "but we didn't dare."

"We didn't want to offend," said

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Ann. "We just didn't know. I feel like such a slob, such an ignorant lazy slob, not knowing anything about a different people. *Any* different people from me. How they think. How they feel. Or what counts with them."

"I know just what you mean," said the little man, beaming on her. "Look at this poor Eddie. Now, he could always rent a dress suit, if he should get a job where he needs one. The job itself would be his credit. Or, I can name you ten people, right around here, who would have stood in back of him, to that extent. But some folks—his old man, for instance, as I remember—they think a debt is a kind of shame. But I mean, in *this* country, people expect people to get a loan and pay it back. I wish Eddie would have looked around and noticed the way we do things. Probably he'll learn, though. So cheer up, good people."

Ann said, "You helped us, you know."

The man's eyes twinkled. "Say, can I fix you a burger? Or a taco, maybe?"

Back at the hotel, after the news came through that poor Byron Reynolds had had a heart attack, the Hartmans made ready to go down to a late dinner. Toby snapped his fingers.

"I'm thinking of our little friend, the counterman," he said. "We forgot to tell him one little touch—the St. Christopher Medal on the dashboard. He'd have enjoyed that—protector of travelers, and so on."

Ann smiled at him. "Yes, but no matter," she said. "Didn't you notice? He *is* St. Christopher."

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complete detective SHORT NOVEL by

PATRICK QUENTIN

Charming, discreet, businesslike Clara Van Heuten ran a Literary Advice Bureau—well, not exactly a literary agency, even though all her clients submitted manuscripts and Clara got at least some of them published. On that fateful day, between 2:30 P.M. and 4:40 P.M., Clara the inscrutable, Clara the mysterious, received nine visitors—and each one, curiously enough, was potentially a murderer . . .

And when that potentiality became a fact, an unusual type of amateur-official detective came on the scene. Timothy Trant, young man-about-town (but definitely not a playboy) had a unique position in the Homicide Bureau—partly because of his high-society background but mostly because of his uncanny talent for understanding the criminal mind . . .

Another twining, intertwining tale of detection from The Golden Thirties, "The Lady Had Nine Lives" is much more ingenious than it appears on the surface—think it over after you have finished reading this tantalizing short novel.

THE LADY HAD NINE LIVES

by PATRICK QUENTIN

OF ALL THE DISCREET, CHARMING appointments in the offices of the Van Heuten Literary Advice Bureau, Mrs. Clara Van Heuten herself was the most discreet and most charming. As she sat at her desk, her white head bent over a pile of manuscripts, she looked exactly what she was—a monument to the surprising success of a society woman who had been obliged to go into business.

"Not a literary agent, my dear," she was in the habit of saying. "Nothing practical or commercially useful, I'm afraid. It's just that I want to be helpful, to guide those who have the urge and the inspiration to write."

And that is what she had told her many society friends five years ago when a sudden and unexpectedly penurious widowhood had forced upon poor, dear Clara the alternatives of elegant dependence or hard-working independence. Everyone had admired her courage in starting the Literary Advice Bureau. They had sent her their own literary efforts. Clara Van Heuten

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was so sympathetic, so encouraging, and then, she charged such absurdly small reading fees. How could she do it?

But she had done it. And now one glance at the expensively furnished office, one glance at Clara Van Heuten's perfectly cut dress, were sufficient to prove that she had risen, like a middle-aged phoenix, from the ashes of financial ruin. As before her widowhood, her Park Avenue apartment was the place where Society met the Intelligentsia, and liked it. Her sympathies were as wide as her circle of friends, both social and literary.

A calm, white-headed woman working at her desk . . . it was incredible that anyone could dislike her. Incredible that she should be capable of rousing any unpleasant or violent emotion. And yet Clara Van Heuten was violently concerned in the emotional lives of nine people who, even now, were converging like inexorable forces toward the pivotal point of her office.

That afternoon Clara Van Heuten was to receive nine visitors. Each one of them was potentially a murderer . . .

"Are you expecting a rather rude man who insists his name is John Smith?"

At the entrance of her secretary, Madeleine Price, Mrs. Van Heuten raised tranquil eyes from the manuscripts on her desk.

"Smith? Surely I don't know any . . . Oh, dear, these authors with their pen names!" The smooth forehead crinkled slightly. "Show him in, Madeleine."

The first visitor to Mrs. Van Heuten was a bronzed, powerful man. He was dressed in expensively inexpensive-looking clothes and swung himself into a chair with the effortless ease of a polo player mounting a pony.

"Why, it's you, John!" exclaimed Mrs. Van Heuten softly. "This is a surprise."

"But not necessarily a pleasant one." There was a hint of menace in the visitor's eyes. "I've come a long way, Clara, to make one very short remark."

Mrs. Van Heuten said placidly, "I was hoping you'd come to settle our little account, John. It's really about time you began to realize your obligations."

"But I do realize my obligations, Clara, and I intend to repay them with my undying gratitude. You wouldn't want me to insult an old friend with cash, would you?"

"You are making things rather difficult for me, John," murmured Mrs. Van Heuten with sorrowful determination. "You were poor when you came to me as a client. I charged no fee. But you did promise to give me a small percentage if, through my help and advice, you found a profitable market. If you continue to forget that promise, I shall be compelled to take—certain steps."

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"Very delicately put, Clara. Does that mean Dane Tolfrey on my trail?"

They sat a moment in silence. Then Mrs. Van Heuten picked up her steel paper knife and tapped on the desk. "There is someone else with whom I could discuss the matter, John."

The man's laughter was frank, amused. "You're a wonderful woman, Clara, but an indifferent bogeyman."

"I mean it, John." Mrs. Van Heuten's shrug was a little too charmingly femine. "You know how I hate unpleasantness. But—after all, this is my business. I have to live."

"Don't be too sure about that." Suddenly John Smith leaned across the desk. "Which reminds me of what I came all this way to tell you. You're beginning to bore me, Mrs. Van Heuten. This is final, positive, and ultimate. I want no more of you or your letters or your veiled threats. That, Clara, is that."

He rose abruptly. "Well, exit John Smith to catch his plane." He strolled to the door, only to pause, a bantering smile revealing cruelly the perfection of his teeth. "Strange as it seems, Clara, I am still very fond of you. Once you gave me advice. Here's some for you: Nice, white-haired ladies shouldn't let off fireworks. They're so very apt to contain—well—dynamite. Goodbye."

This unpleasant interview seemed to have ruffled only the surface of Mrs. Van Heuten's mellow serenity. She was once more bending calmly over her manuscripts when Madeleine Price appeared, to announce the second visitor.

"Mr. Robert Bristol."

"Oh, dear, another of my failures! Really, I—"

Mrs. Van Heuten broke off as a pale, rather intense young man with unkempt hair and a drawn, sensitive face swung into the room. The youthful author dropped into a chair, his fingers rolling and unrolling the ends of his shabby necktie.

"Listen, Mrs. Van Heuten; if I don't talk to someone, heaven knows what I'll do. And you're about the only friend that I've got now. Helen's left me. She wants a divorce."

Brokenly, the boy poured out the age-old tale of a wife he loved who wanted another man. Mrs. Van Heuten's face registered both genuine and professional sympathy.

"Perhaps," she murmured soothingly, "this isn't such a tragedy, Bobby. After all, it was really through my helping to place your first novel with Salter's that you met Helen. I must say, since I feel a wee bit responsible, that I always thought she was a little—interested."

"What do you mean?" Robert Bristol looked up sharply.

"Well, my dear, you were the son of a very rich man when you married. Helen had nothing except her

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looks and her job in the art department at Salter's. You were a very good catch. And now that your poor father's dead and there's this dreadful trouble about his estate—well, Helen's leaving you at a time when the right sort of wife would do her utmost to stand by you."

"She didn't—didn't marry me just because she thought I was going to inherit money. She's fond of me still." Bobby's eyes blazed suddenly, then grew dull, hopeless. "What's the use, anyway? At least there's still my new novel. You—you've heard anything from Salter's?"

"I wrote a special note to Larry Graves about it." A guarded expression slipped into Mrs. Van Heuten's eyes. "You know I never act as a regular literary agent, Bobby, but, in your case, I broke my rule—for the son of my oldest friend, and—"

She paused at the sound of a door opening. Both she and Bobby Bristol turned sharply to see a florid, middle-aged man appearing around a tall screen which cut off a corner of the room behind the desk. "Oh, it's you, Dane."

Mrs. Van Heuten flashed a smile at her third visitor, Dane Tolfrey, and economically expended the remnants of it on Bristol. "Well, Bobby, I'll do everything I can for you. Goodbye."

As Bristol hurried out of the room, the man who had come in from behind the screen moved unsteadily to a chair. His pouched eyes watched Clara's with impish shrewdness as she told him of her interview with John Smith.

"John was a mistake," he said sympathetically. "And I've come to stop you from making another. Remember that young writer—Derek Muir?"

"Yes, Dane. He's coming here this afternoon."

"Well, I thought he might have talent at first. But I've changed my mind. Too effete. Thumbs down, I'd say."

"I can always trust your judgment on prospective clients, Dane. I'll count Mr. Muir out."

"And, while we're on the subject of counting, Clara"—Dane Tolfrey leaned forward, impregnating his whisper with the fumes of brandy—"what about a little loan—say five hundred?"

Rather reluctantly, Mrs. Van Heuten produced a checkbook and scribbled a check for $350.

"You know, Dane," she said as she handed it to him, "as my oldest friend, I'm leaving you quite a lot of money in my will, but there won't be much left if you go on spending it on drink and horses this way."

"Alas! Brandy is the priceless ingredient of the Tolfrey blood." Dane Tolfrey was eying the check a trifle disappointedly as he rose. "I will depart as discreetly as I came—through the washroom." He blew a vinous kiss in valediction.

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A few minutes later Madeleine Price appeared, to announce the fourth visitor.

"Mr. Derek Muir."

The young man Dane Tolfrey had considered an undesirable client drifted in, cool and immaculate. With one glance Mrs. Van Heuten's acute eyes appraised the too-perfect profile.

"I wandered in at Mr. Tolfrey's suggestion to find out if you'd decided on the status of my literary talent." Derek Muir arranged himself in a chair.

"I've read your—er—manuscripts, Mr. Muir." Mrs. Van Heuten's tone was at once bright and final. "And I'm afraid I have bad news for you."

"You're going to reject me?"

"Some authors I feel I can help, Mr. Muir. But"—her hands fluttered like helpless, well-bred birds—"certain fields are rather beyond my scope."

Muir's shrug showed elaborate world-weariness. "I suppose I'm too—er—complicated for you."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Muir." Mrs. Van Heuten had picked up the paper knife again and was twisting it idly. "I can't help all young authors."

"Only too depressingly true." Derek Muir rose, and strolled to the door. "By the way, Mrs. Van Heuten," he added slowly, "I, personally, am as harmless as a lamb, but has it ever occurred to you that some of your other would-be clients might not accept disappointment with such admirable resignation?"

Suddenly Mrs. Van Heuten realized that his gaze was concentrated on the hard steel of the paper knife clasped between her fingers. She dropped it with a clatter.

After he had gone, Mrs. Van Heuten sat very still for a few moments. She looked older now, less sure of herself. She started at the brisk voice of her secretary:

"Four ladies are in the office—Mrs. Hobart, Beatrice Kennet, Gilda Dawn, and the Princess Walonska."

"All four together?" Even the socially prominent Clara Van Heuten could not but be impressed at receiving a simultaneous visit from four of the most beautiful, the most envied women in America. "Ask them in, Madeleine."

The door closed behind the secretary, and opened again to admit the four women, whose selection of wardrobe, husband, or summer resort inevitably made news. Each of them carried a new brief case.

"Oh, how nice of you to drop in!" said Mrs. Van Heuten.

Her visitors did not reply. The Princess Walonska (nee Patricia Cheney of *the* Manhattan Cheneys) moved majestically toward the desk. Her aristocratic young face was pale and determined, her eyes cold.

The authoress, Beatrice Kennet, was at her side, svelte and streamlined. A sardonic smile twisted her

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puckish mouth, as though she had just conjured up one of her famous and cruelly brilliant epigrams.

Just behind them was Gilda Dawn, Hollywood's "Lotus Lady," withdrawn in her own loveliness.

Mrs. Susan Hobart, daughter and sole heiress of Samuel Stuckey, multimillionaire meat king, stood apart. She was fingering her brief case like a pretty, frightened child who has been incongruously entrusted with an infernal machine.

"You've each brought a manuscript! Well, this *is* a pleasant surprise. Won't you sit . . .?" Mrs. Van Heuten's voice trailed off.

The four women were gazing at her.

"I think you know why we've come," the Princess said.

Her gloved hand tugged at the fastening of her brief case. Her companions followed suit, as though carrying out some rehearsed maneuver.

Clara Van Heuten's lips stirred, but no words came. Her eyes had rested on the Princess' opening brief case, only to widen in blank terror as they moved to those of the three other women.

For, lying in the dark interior of each brief case, she had seen—not a manuscript, but a small black revolver . . .

It was almost half an hour since the Princess Walonska and her three companions had taken their unsmiling departure. Outside Mrs. Van Heuten's office, her secretary was bending over her typewriter. Her face was hard, almost gaunt.

Suddenly the outside door swung open. Madeleine's eyes turned to the clock; 4:40 P.M. . . . It had become automatic with her to notice the exact time of a client's arrival.

The ninth visitor was a good-looking, rather aggressive girl who wore her stylish clothes with a dash. Her green eyes were hard, competent. "I want to see Mrs. Van Heuten," she said.

"Mrs. Van Heuten sent me special orders by her—her last clients that she wasn't to be disturbed until five. Are you a client?"

"A client?" The girl laughed harshly. "Heaven forbid. But I have something to say to Mrs. Van Heuten."

The green eyes flashed as she moved toward the door of Mrs. Van Heuten's office. But Madeleine Price had sprung forward and barred the way.

"You seem very anxious to keep me from seeing her," snapped the girl.

"I'm only obeying instructions. You can leave a message."

"All right." The girl's lips had gone very pale. "Tell Mrs. Van Heuten that she's both stupid and cruel. It's a dangerous combination. One of these days someone will probably murder her for it."

Abruptly the last visitor turned and left the office.

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Murder!

Madeleine Price stood still for a moment. Then, impassively, she returned to her typewriter. When the clock hands pointed to five, she collected her letters and stepped into the inner office.

Her eyes widened as she looked at Mrs. Van Heuten. That lady was slumped across the desk, her white head resting on her arms.

Madeleine Price touched her employer's arm. For a moment the fingers rested there as though frozen.

"Mrs. Van Heut . . . !"

Her voice trailed off. For her gaze had settled on her employer's back.

Reflecting the dying sunshine almost playfully, there protruded from beneath Mrs. Van Heuten's left shoulder blade the handle of her steel paper knife. Dark stains had spread shockingly on the soft material of the modish dress. Blood . . .

Thoughts were scudding like storm clouds through Madeleine's brain. What had that girl said just now? . . . *One of these days someone will probably* . . .

Mrs. Van Heuten *had* been murdered . . .

Only gradually did Madeleine gather up the loose threads of her control. At length she walked back to the outer office and lifted the telephone receiver.

"Hello, hello . . . the police . . . ?"

Somehow she managed to give precise replies to the sharp, official questions. Yes, she would see that nothing was touched.

She realized the police would want to know about the people who had visited Mrs. Van Heuten that afternoon. With trembling fingers she started to type:

VISITORS TO
MRS. VAN HEUTEN

APPROXIMATE TIME OF ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

John Smith ..... 2:30 to 2:45
Robert Bristol ..... 3:05 to 3:20
Derek Muir ..... 3:30 to 3:40
The Princess Walonska, Mrs. Hobart, Beatrice Kennet, Gilda Dawn — Admitted together ..... 3:50 to 4:15
Young woman (refused name) not admitted 4:40

She had barely finished when the police arrived. Mechanically she answered their questions.

When at last she was alone in the outer office, the door opened to admit a young man in a gray suit with a maroon shirt and a black tie. He had a pleasant, oddly arresting face. At first Madeleine thought he was a stray client or a newspaper reporter.

But as he shot her one swift comprehensive glance, she realized immediately that he must be a detective. She felt, in that brief moment, that this young man had taken in and summed up practically everything about her.

And Madeleine was probably right, for Detective Timothy Trant was an extraordinarily perspicacious young man. The son of a cele-

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d society physician and a grad- of one of America's oldest universities, he had abandoned a promising future in law to grace the Homicide Bureau for two very definite reasons: he had discovered that crime fascinated him, and that murderers were always interesting.

The advent of this unaccountable young law student in the Homicide Bureau had been as unusual as that of a panther cub in a litter of lions. But gradually the Chief had evolved for Detective Trant a role which at once exploited the young man's uncanny talent for understanding the criminal mind, while it minimized his defects of unconventionality and impatience with solid routine investigation.

A regular and dependable lion of an Inspector was put in office charge of a murder case, while Detective Timothy Trant, the temperamental, subtle, but dangerous panther, was teamed with him in very loose harness. With six major cases to his credit, Timothy had won the respect of even the most hard-boiled of his colleagues.

When the young detective entered the inner office of the Advice Bureau, Inspector Jervis, a brisk old-timer, had the routine investigation well under way. The cameraman and the fingerprint expert were at work at the desk, while the assistant medical examiner fussed about impatiently.

Inspector Jervis' eyes rested with amused gravity on Timothy's maroon shirt and black tie. The young detective's unshakable habit of wearing solid colors in his haberdashery was his only major idiosyncrasy.

"Red and black, Trant. That's a bad sign."

"An accidental tribute to violent death, Inspector. Black for mourning; red for murder."

Timothy stared with deceptively casual eyes at the body. He had met Clara Van Heuten once at a tea, and remembered her as a very charming, very sweet, very vivacious matron. He also remembered that he hadn't quite liked her.

The Inspector outlined briefly what little had been learned from Madeleine Price. Jervis was particularly interested in the door behind the screen which led through a washroom to the inside fire stairs. According to the secretary, it was never locked during business hours.

"I figure," concluded the Inspector, "that this'll probably turn out to be a sneak thief job. Any thug in New York could have come in through that back door."

Timothy's gaze moved slowly from Mrs. Van Heuten's left hand to the open pocketbook lying near her on the desk. "And walked out again, leaving that diamond ring and those tempting ten-dollar bills behind? No. I don't think Mrs. Van Heuten was killed by a sneak thief."

Timothy strolled toward the door behind the screen and entered a small washroom. A second door

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opened into a narrow passage which led to the fire tower. Timothy's interest increased. When he had hurried through the outer office of the Advice Bureau, he had noticed a regular fire exit there. This almost secret entrance seemed strangely superfluous.

He returned to the inner office and the Inspector. "What is this Literary Advice Bureau anyway?" he asked.

"It's more in your line than mine." Jervis nodded to a pile of manuscripts.

Timothy looked at the first sheet. It was a harsh modernistic poem whose realism Clara Van Heuten had softened by changing the word *stench* to *odor*. He read through a few more manuscripts.

"No reputable literary agent would handle junk like this," he murmured, with a slow smile. "You can take my word, Inspector, if this is the sort of tripe Mrs. Van Heuten dabbled in, she couldn't have made much money." The keen eyes moved around the room. "And yet this is a very expensive office."

Jervis grunted. "Society dames don't go into business to make money. It's just a hobby."

"But," said Timothy, "I happen to remember that Mrs. Van Heuten was flat broke five years ago when her husband died."

The problem of Mrs. Van Heuten was beginning to intrigue the young detective more and more. He started to run through the correspondence which Madeleine Price had typed that afternoon. There were mostly bills with checks attached. Next he rummaged in drawers until he found Mrs. Van Heuten's checkbook. He skimmed through the stubs, paused over one, and glanced at a plain-clothes man who was on his knees gloomily peering under the desk.

"Find any checks lying around, Mac?"

"Only what was in that basket."

Timothy seemed puzzled. "Inspector, can I see that list of the people who came here today?"

When the Inspector handed it to him, Timothy studied it carefully. John Smith, Robert Bristol, Derek Muir . . . these names meant nothing to him. But he gave a low whistle when his gaze fell on those of the four famous ladies: Princess Patricia Walonska, whose marriage to Prince Nicolas Walonski had recently overflowed the society columns; Beatrice Kennet, the smart magazine writer whose ironic quips were aped by all would-be sophisticates; Gilda Dawn, Lotus Lady of the screen and glorified prototype of countless imitative working girls; and Mrs. Susan Hobart, Ohio multimillionairess whose recent romance with a popular American sportsman had been a reversal of the Cinderella myth . . .

Why on earth had those four utterly incongruous celebrities paid a mass visit to Mrs. Van Heuten?

Swiftly he glanced from the list

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to the stubs in the checkbook. A curious smile moved his lips. "I'll keep this list, if I may, Jervis." Carefully he put checkbook and letters in his pocket. "I want to have a little talk with the secretary."

"Got something?" queried the Inspector.

"Perhaps." Timothy moved to the door. "Very expensive offices, very expensive diamond ring, very bad manuscripts, and an unnecessary and unlocked back door."

In the outer office Timothy found the secretary sitting, pale and erect at her desk. She had an interesting face, he thought, and despite the shabby clothes and the defiant absence of make-up there was something fundamentally attractive there. Remarkable eyes, too. Had it not been for the occasional flickering of her eyelids, he would never have guessed that she was struggling with intense fear or nervousness.

"I'm just another policeman in disguise, Miss Price," he said, with a disarming smile.

Madeleine Price did not appear to be disarmed. Her face was studiedly expressionless as she answered his questions . . . Mrs. Van Heuten had been a successful and popular woman with many clients and many friends. Mrs. Van Heuten had been a considerate employer, although, the girl added acidly, inclined to be more generous in her words than in her deeds.

"A soft sweet woman with a hard heart," broke in Timothy musingly. "Perhaps that's why I didn't like her. Now, Miss Price, tell me about this business."

The secretary explained that Mrs. Van Heuten had read manuscripts and offered her artistic advice for a standard fee ranging from $5 to $25, according to the length of the manuscript. She had not been a regular literary agent who placed manuscripts with editors, and, if she had occasionally exerted influence in behalf of a client's stories, it had been purely as a friendly gesture.

"So this prosperous business was built up entirely on those fees?" Timothy's voice was incredulous.

"There were a great many clients."

Timothy leaned across the desk. "The Literary Advice Bureau wasn't an undercover racket?" he asked suddenly.

"Don't be ridiculous!"

Timothy grinned, and produced from his pocket the list of visitors which the secretary had typed. He asked her to run through the events of the afternoon. When Madeleine described her scene with the nameless green-eyed girl, he cut in quickly, "So that young lady prophesied Mrs. Van Heuten's murder? Wasn't that rather odd if this really is a reputable business?"

"She was probably crazy," remarked Madeleine coolly. "Besides, she never went into the inner office. She couldn't possibly have committed the murder."

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"And yet you saw Mrs. Van Heuten alive after all the other visitors had gone."

"The last time I saw her alive was when I went in to tell her the Princess Walonska and her friends had arrived."

"She didn't ring for you when those four women left?"

"No. They came out of the office very suddenly. The Princess stopped at my desk and said Mrs. Van Heuten was not to be disturbed before five o'clock."

"So those four celebrities *did* have an opportunity to commit the crime!" Timothy's eyes widened. "Did Mrs. Van Heuten seem at all worried when you told her they'd arrived?"

"Y-yes. She seemed rather—er—taken aback."

Timothy reflected a moment and then extracted the sheaf of letters from his pocket. "Are these all the letters you typed this afternoon?"

The secretary flicked through them. "Yes—I'm certain."

"We're blazing a trail, Miss Price." Timothy looked satisfied. "Mrs. Van Heuten had a visitor this afternoon in addition to the eight recorded on your admirable list—a Mr. Dane Tolfrey."

"Why, Mr. Tolfrey didn't come here this afternoon," said the girl.

Timothy held out Mrs. Van Heuten's checkbook. "There's the stub here of another check, written later than those attached to your letters—$350 to a Dane Tolfrey. It's nowhere in Mrs. Van Heuten's office. There's only one logical explanation. Mr. Tolfrey came in person this afternoon to collect it. You never saw him because he came in through that back entrance behind the screen."

"That's possible," Madeline admitted. "He knew about the back way."

"Which implies that most people didn't?" Timothy was very alert now.

"Mrs. Van Heuten made a point of keeping it—er—secret. It was her only means of leaving the office when there were clients here she didn't want to see. Mr. Tolfrey was the only other person who knew about it."

Timothy scrutinized the girl's face intently. "Who is this Mr. Tolfrey?"

"Why, he's—he's Mrs. Van Heuten's oldest friend. I don't know much about him except that he always seemed to be slightly—er—drunk."

"The oldest friend of the respectable Mrs. Van Heuten slightly drunk! How unexpected! But then there seem to be several unexpected things about Mr. Tolfrey. Doesn't it strike you as odd that Mrs. Van Heuten, who you implied was rather ungenerous, should have given him a check for $350? Could it have been blackmail?"

"Blackmail?" Madeleine looked contemptuous. "Why should anyone blackmail Mrs. Van Heuten?"

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"You've narrowed down the suspects delightfully, Miss Price. If, for the time being, we eliminate the Walonska brigade as above suspicion, we shall have to assume the murderer used the back entrance. Only you and Mr. Tolfrey knew of its existence."

"Then you think Mr. Tolfrey murdered Mrs. Van Heuten?"

"One hardly stabs the goose that's just laid 350 golden eggs."

"Then—then, what . . . ?"

"Exactly. We are left with only you as a suspect, Miss Price. I suppose you didn't murder Mrs. Van Heuten, by any chance?"

"Certainly not."

"How inconsiderate of you. It would have made everything so simple."

At that moment a sergeant appeared to say the medical examiner was through.

"Well, Doc," asked Timothy, as he entered the inner office, "when did she die?"

"I'm no wizard, Trant, but I'd put four as the earliest and five as the latest." The medical examiner stuffed instruments into his black bag. "She died from the knife wounds. She was stabbed four times."

Timothy's jaw dropped. "Four times—four women!"

Inspector Jervis moved to his side. "You're not trying to figure out the Princess Walonska and those dames did the job together? They'd left the office before . . ."

"Maybe they hadn't." Timothy outlined what Madeleine Price had told him.

Jervis looked worried. "D'you realize what that means? The Walonska woman belongs to the Cheney family. They have enough political pull to yank us all out of the force like abscessed teeth."

"I realize that," said Timothy.

"Guess they'll be a good job for a society hound like you," said the Inspector. "Got anything else out of the secretary?"

Timothy explained how, if Miss Price could be believed about the secrecy surrounding the back door, the obvious suspects could be restricted to the four women, Madeleine Price herself, and Dane Tolfrey. He started to say something else and then hurried to the outer office. Madeleine Price had put on an austerely round hat and seemed impatient to leave.

"Miss Price, any idea where Dane Tolfrey could be found at this time of day?"

"Why, yes, I'm sure he's practically always at the Longval bar."

"Fine. And wait a minute." Timothy dashed into the inner office. "With any luck, Inspector, Tolfrey's at Longval's. I'm going there to have a little informal chat with him before he finds out about the murder—officially. Have a man trail him when he leaves. Dane Tolfrey won't know the police have discovered he's been here this afternoon. He may give us a lead."

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Back in the outer office, Timothy grinned at Madeleine Price. "Got a mirror?"

Without comment the girl produced one.

"Fine. Hold it up, please." Timothy felt in his hip pocket and produced two plain-colored ties—one blue, the other maroon. He whipped off the black tie and put on the maroon one in its place.

The girl was staring blankly. "Why—why are you doing that?"

"The modern substitute for the old-fashioned false beard and whiskers, Miss Price. All my own idea. Plain-colored shirt and no tie—tough, for low-life police assignments. Plain-colored shirt and black tie—respectable, unobtrusive. Maroon shirt and maroon tie—the promising young client of the Advice Bureau who is soon going to wander casually into the Longval bar to have a drink with Dane Tolfrey."

Madeleine shrugged. "You must be mad!"

"That's a rather hasty judgment, Miss Price." Timothy turned and very solemnly gave a rakish tilt to her plain round hat. "There! If you must wear a soup plate on your head, give it an interesting twist."

Very deliberately the girl straightened her hat again. "May I go now?"

"Not immediately. You see, you're going to come and point out to me Mrs. Van Heuten's oldest friend."

Standing in the doorway of the Longval bar, Madeleine nodded toward a florid, middle-aged individual on a stool at the end of the bar. "That's Mr. Tolfrey. Now may I go, please?"

"You're unflatteringly eager to leave me. Yes, you may go, Miss Price. But remember, you're a material witness, so don't leave New York."

The girl hurried away. Timothy slipped onto the stool next to Dane Tolfrey. As he ordered a drink, he glanced at the other man's coarse, rather bloated face. Mr. Tolfrey, he felt, was possibly less drunk than he appeared.

He laid a limp finger on his neighbor's arm. "Aren't you Dane Tolfrey?" he drawled. "I drifted into Clara's office this afternoon and she was talking about you."

Tolfrey turned with spirituous deliberation. His pouched eyes fixed Timothy intently. "Know you!" he said suddenly. "Know everyone in New York. You're Doc Trant's son." He paused, then added sharply, "Poleeshman, aren't you?"

The swiftness of this question almost took Timothy off his guard. "A policeman?" He drooped jaded eyelids. "My dear fellow, I'm just a poet."

Tolfrey peered at the maroon shirt and broke into a gale of laughter. "Should have realized a poleeshman wouldn't wear shirt like that!"

"One has one's individual taste in haberdashery," said Timothy. "By

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the way, Clara told me you'd been in to see her this afternoon."

Tolfrey nodded vaguely. "Fine woman. Most respectable woman in New York."

"You went in by the back entrance, didn't you? That's the way I always use."

Tolfrey sat up suddenly. "You know about back entrance?" His voice was thick with incredulity. "Then you—you musht be great friend of Clara's."

"She's a very good friend. For example"—Timothy leaned confidentially closer—"I was pretty low in cash this afternoon. Clara wrote me a check right away. So generous, isn't she?"

Tolfrey seemed thoroughly bewildered now. "Clara generous!" he echoed after a moment. "Never gave a cent away without getting a dollar back on it."

The incomprehension in his eyes gradually changed to sly understanding. "So you're working with Clara! Makes everything plain . . ."

"Yes, of course I'm working with Clara," said Timothy, completely at sea. "Wonderful racket of hers, isn't it?"

"Wunnerful!" said Tolfrey blearily. "Smartest business in town . . ." A sudden flicker of apprehension moved across the heavy face. He added hurriedly, "Clara smart enough to realize everyone thinks they can write. Capitalizes on it."

Timothy was perplexed and tantalized. Tolfrey had admitted being one of the nine visitors; he had also tacitly admitted that Mrs. Van Heuten's check had not been given him out of mere friendly generosity. But, somehow, Timothy felt that he had elicited something else—something whose importance he could not quite gauge—from this man who was now obviously on his guard against further admissions.

Timothy stepped out of the bar and bought an evening paper. He noticed with satisfaction that a very familiar figure in very plain clothes was lounging casually on the sidewalk. Jervis had lost no time in sending over a man to tail Tolfrey.

After a meaning glance at Detective Barnes, Timothy hurried back to the bar. The news of Mrs. Van Heuten's death had not come out yet, but he might get away with it.

"How perfectly ghastly!" He seized Tolfrey by the arm. "In the latest news column it says that poor Clara's been found dead in her office —murdered!"

Tolfrey blinked, his mouth drooping half open. Then he did the one thing which Timothy could not have expected. He laughed—loudly, alcoholically. "That'sh a good one," he exclaimed. "Very good one. Clara murdered! 'S if anyone could murder Clara! Know what'sh wrong with you, poet? You're drunk. That'sh what you are—drunk!"

And in that fashion was the news of Clara Van Heuten's death received by her oldest friend . . .

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Knowing that Barnes could be trusted to watch Tolfrey, Timothy left him, walked the few blocks to his bachelor apartment, and ate a thoroughly unpicturesque meal which his manservant, Oscar, had prepared for him. He was just getting up from the table when the telephone rang. He answered it leisurely.

"Trant? Barnes. I'm round at the Regina Hotel—where Tolfrey lives. He came straight here. First thing he did was to cash a check with the manager. Then he sent for a messenger boy."

"Fine. Anything else?"

"He called three numbers. Lipscomb 2-1916, Derwent 3-2683, American 2-7223. In that order. He's up in his room now."

Timothy jotted down the numbers. From Information, he learned that Lipscomb 2-1916 was the residence of a Mrs. Sarah Perkins on West 124th Street. That did not sound too promising. But Derwent 3-2683 proved to be the telephone number of the Princess Walonska's mansion on Sutton Place. So Tolfrey *had* given him a lead! The third number, American 2-7223, quite astonishingly proved to be that of North American University. Timothy decided to suspend activities temporarily and indulge in a little quiet meditation. At the end of two hours and innumerable cigarettes he made a decision. He went down to the street, called a taxi, and was driven to the home of Princess Walonska. He proffered his official badge to the butler's flustered, distasteful gaze, gave his name, and was ushered into a large hall.

The butler's departing footsteps were followed by silence—a long, chilly silence. At length, very remote, Timothy's ears caught another sound. It clarified into the sharp clicking of feminine heels, growing nearer and nearer. And then four women appeared—four beautiful women, keeping close together. They paused directly in front of Timothy, regarding him from hostile eyes.

"Perhaps," said the Princess coldly, "you'll explain the reason for this visit."

"I've come," murmured Timothy, smiling, "to consider you four ladies as the potential murderesses of Clara Van Heuten."

The four women moved infinitesimally closer together.

In that brief interlude of silence Mrs. Hobart attracted Timothy's especial attention. He could sense fear in the restlessness of her tiny hands and in the emphasized ivory of her cheeks. Knowing that she was afraid, Timothy could sense also that behind their glacial veneer, her companions, too, were each a prey to some unfathomable apprehension.

Patricia Walonska turned a coldly alabaster profile and addressed the telephone table. "We have been informed of the tragedy," she mur-

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mured. "We are naturally prepared to answer questions."

"Excellent, Princess. Then, perhaps you will tell me why you four ladies paid that mass visit to the Literary Advice Bureau this afternoon?"

After a fragmentary pause the Princess said, "We were taking stories to Mrs. Van Heuten for advice."

"All of you?" Timothy's eyes widened. "What a galaxy of talent."

"Miss Kennet, of course, is a professional author," added Patricia Walonska hurriedly. "The rest of us merely amuse ourselves at writing —now and then."

"I hate to sound incredulous." Timothy sat down on the edge of the telephone table. "But we found no stories under any of your names in the Advice Bureau's office."

Gilda Dawn exchanged a flawless right profile for an equally flawless left profile. "We didn't say we *left* our manuscripts. Mrs. Van Heuten was rather busy at the time, so we decided we'd take them back again tomorrow."

Timothy grinned. His gaze settled on the Princess. "When you left Mrs. Van Heuten, you told the secretary not to disturb her before five o'clock."

"I did as Mrs. Van Heuten asked."

"You realize, of course, that, so far as we know, you four ladies were the last to see Mrs. Van Heuten alive?"

"Someone else had to be the last to see her." Princess Walonska's voice was very quiet. "We know nothing about her death."

"That's too bad." Timothy moved his grave gaze around the little circle. "I was hoping you noticed something unusual about her, heard some noise or . . ."

There was a brief pause; then, rather too precipitously, Susan Hobart leaned forward. "But I did hear a thound, Mr. Trant"—there was the slightest indication of a lisp —"a faint kind of thcuffling behind —behind that thcreen!"

For an instant the Princess' eyes flickered, then she added firmly, "I remember hearing something of the sort myself."

It was very unconvincing.

"Exactly what kind . . . ?"

Timothy broke off as the telephone by his elbow rang. The Princess answered it.

"Hello . . . oh, yes." The relief in her voice was obvious. "It's for you, Susan. Long distance."

Susan Hobart flushed, hesitated, and then pressed the telephone against her small ear. "Hello? . . . Oh, it's *you,* darling . . ." She giggled nervously. "The butler told me you called at seven thith evening, when I was out . . . Of course, I'm dying to come home, darling, but . . ." She glanced sideways at Timothy and flushed an even deeper pink. "I'll call you back tomorrow. Good night, darling, and . . . k-kisses." Her fingers ca-

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ressed the receiver back onto its stand. "My huthband," she murmured shyly.

"He's Hobart, the polo player, isn't he?" said Timothy. "Is he in New York?"

"Oh, no. He'th too busy running the factory down at Winton."

Once again there was a flat moment of silence.

"Perhaps," said Timothy, "you'd let me see those stories you took to Mrs. Van Heuten."

Rather too quickly, Patricia Walonska rang for the butler. Within a few moments he was handing a little pile of typewritten sheets to Timothy.

Timothy's eyes rested with innocent politeness on the Princess's face. "Perhaps you'd lend me a brief case to carry them in. One of those you used this afternoon, for example."

The four women exchanged swift glances. After an instant's pause the Princess moved regally away through the hall.

In the Princess's absence Timothy murmured, "I'm rather interested in why you three—er—celebrated ladies should be staying here with the Princess."

Gilda Dawn's shoulders stirred. "The Prince is in Europe, buying up his old family estate. Patricia was alone; I happened to be in New York and . . . ."

"We four lone, lorn females decided to cling together in chaste, if temporary seclusion," snapped Beatrice Kennet.

"Here, Mr. Trant." Patricia Walonska was once more at Timothy's side, holding out a new brief case. Timothy took it and slipped the manuscripts inside.

"Well, ladies"—he glanced solemnly from one face to another—"let's assume for the moment that everything you've said is absolutely untrue."

"But what . . . ?"

"You didn't, by any chance, visit Mrs. Van Heuten this afternoon because she had been blackmailing you?"

To his surprise Beatrice Kennet's eyes twinkled with amusement. "I don't know which is funnier," she said slowly, "the picture of Clara Van Heuten as a blackmailer or the idea of any one of us being blackmailed. We're all respectably married women who lead unsensational lives."

"Caesar's four wives." Timothy's gravity was faintly mocking. "In other words, you'd vouch for Mrs. Van Heuten's respectability as you would for your own?"

"I would say," said Patricia Walonska, "that Mrs. Van Heuten's respectability was her major asset."

Timothy took out his notebook and gazed at it thoughtfully. His eyes settled on the third number which Dane Tolfrey had called—American 2-7223—North American University. It was a long shot, but it might strike a spark.

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"Mind if I use your phone, Princess?"

Patricia Walonska inclined her head.

"You don't happen to know the number of North American University?" he asked.

The effect of his question was astonishing. Beatrice Kennet leaned forward tensely. Gilda Dawn's shell-nailed fingers clutched nervously at her silver purse. The Princess had gone rather pale.

"No," she said.

Timothy stared at the four women. "I'm afraid I've alarmed you."

The Lotus Lady laughed rather shrilly. "It merely seemed quaint," she offered, "to be calling North American University at this time of night."

"Ah, perhaps it is," Timothy said smoothly. "You are probably right. I'll call them in the morning." He picked up the brief case. "Well, ladies, it's been so charming. And you'll all stay in town a little while longer, won't you?"

"If necessary," said the Princess slowly. "But, Mr. Trant, you must see to it that our names are kept strictly out of the papers." This was a Cheney threat, backed up by all the force of Cheney influence.

"I'll do my best, Princess." Timothy moved to the door. "By the way, do any of you know a Mr. Dane Tolfrey?"

The Princess's gaze flickered. "I believe he was a friend of Mrs. Van Heuten's. I don't know him personally."

"And yet he knew you well enough to telephone you this evening."

"Er—yes." The Princess turned away. "He called to tell me the tragic news. I suppose he thought that, as an old friend of Clara's, I should be informed."

"Very considerate of him."

Timothy smiled and waved a farewell with the brief case.

The front door was just closing behind him when he heard his name called. Susan Hobart had slipped out.

"Oh, Mr. Trant." She looked up at Timothy from round, naive eyes —and yet, were they so naive? Timothy wondered suddenly. "There's something I've got to ask you," she whispered. "Doeth anyone really think that I . . . that we . . . that anything so horrid . . .?"

"How could anyone think anything so horrid about you?" Timothy smiled down at the wistful, girlish face. "There's only one black mark against you—a telephonically attentive husband."

"But my huthband'th in Ohio, Mr. Trant," she breathed. "And that's *tho very* far away."

To his utter astonishment Susan Hobart moved impulsively forward. She threw her small arms around his neck and pressed her lips against his. It was a long businesslike kiss.

By the time Timothy had

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stopped being surprised and was starting to enjoy it, she had drawn away from him with a little sob. "Oh, it's all—all tho awful."

"Was I really as bad as all that?" asked Timothy, smiling.

"Oh, no, I meant—everything." Susan Hobart's eyes were wide again, guileless. "You're nith and —awfully attractive."

"And you," said Timothy, "are the nicest and most unaccountable of four extremely unaccountable women."

Timothy had already decided on his next move. He was going to visit the recipient of Tolfrey's first telephone call—Mrs. Sarah Perkins, of West 124th Street.

A taxi dropped him before a shabby, dismal house, tacked to whose wall was a faded sign announcing: "Rooms For Rent." The door was opened by a slatternly middle-aged woman—presumably Sarah Perkins herself. She took one gloomy look at Timothy's maroon shirt and tie, and said, "I know who you want. Mr. Muir wears them fancy shirts, too."

Timothy gulped. This was just too easy. Derek Muir, the third of the nine visitors—Tolfrey had telephoned to him, too.

"Fifth floor back," added the depressed Mrs. Perkins. "And you better tell Muir that some of that money the messenger boy brought is coming to me for the rent."

Tolfrey had cashed Mrs. Van Heuten's check and sent for a messenger boy! The implications were obvious.

There was only one visible door on the fifth floor. At a bored "Come in," Timothy entered one of the dreariest rooms he had ever seen, to encounter one of the handsomest young men he had ever seen. Derek Muir was lounging on a bed.

Mrs. Van Heuten's third visitor accepted Timothy without comment. Languidly, he claimed to be a struggling author who had yet to find a market. He had heard of Mrs. Van Heuten's bureau and had gone there to seek her advice on a manuscript. She had turned him down for some reason best known to herself—and he had left. That was all he knew.

Had he noticed a back door? Really, he was no architect. Almost too readily, Muir produced a manuscript from a drawer.

"The masterpiece," he drawled.

Timothy glanced through the first paragraphs. This rejected manuscript was surprisingly well written—obviously superior to the material he had seen in Mrs. Van Heuten's office. Timothy slipped the story into his pocket.

"I rather feel," murmured Muir, a slightly derisive smile in his long-lashed eyes, "that you're wasting your time suspecting me. I never met Clara Van Heuten until today —and I left the office quite some time before the murder."

"Yes. You would seem remark-

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ably innocent, Mr. Muir," agreed Timothy, "if I hadn't found out about the money Dane Tolfrey sent you this evening."

For an instant Derek Muir's eyelids flickered. "Tolfrey!" he exclaimed. "So *he* sent me that $250, did he?"

"You claim," asked Timothy patiently, "that Tolfrey didn't tell you he was sending the money when he telephoned to you this evening?"

"But he didn't telephone," Muir protested ingenuously. "I only met the man once in a bar—a rather inebriated individual. Incidentally, he was the person who recommended Mrs. Van Heuten to me. Why on earth should he have been so generous, do you suppose?"

Timothy crossed to his side. "You're a very entertaining young man, Mr. Muir, but it's rather foolish to be too entertaining with the police."

"But you're such an entertaining policeman." Muir glanced at him calmly. "And in return for having amused me I'll tell you something. This afternoon, as I was leaving the Advice Bureau, I ran into a quartet of astonishingly beautiful women. One of them was Gilda Dawn. They were going into Mrs. Van Heuten's office."

"Yes?" said Timothy.

"Having tried and failed to crash the movies myself," continued Muir, "and having met Miss Dawn's now almost—er—ex-current husband, I was naturally interested in the Lotus Lady. I waited outside the building for them to emerge. I was going to plead politely for Miss Dawn's autograph, but she was all het up. So were the others. They merely swept by."

"And you heard them say something?" Timothy asked.

"Exactly. It was Miss Dawn herself. I heard her say, *'Thank heaven, it's over. That hunted expression in her eyes—I shall never forget it.'*"

Timothy felt the time had come for a showdown with Dane Tolfrey, the mysterious link between the visitors, the man whose acquaintance both Muir and the Princess Walonska had been so strenuously eager to deny. A taxi dropped him at the Regina Hotel. In the lobby Timothy ran into Barnes, the plain-clothes man, emerging from a telephone booth.

"Trant! I've just been trying to get you. Tolfrey made another call a few minutes ago—to that secretary."

"He did? What's his room number?"

"604—why?"

"We're going to talk to him."

Timothy hurried to the elevator. On the sixth floor he knocked at Tolfrey's door. He turned the handle. It opened, and he crossed the threshold. All the lights in the living room were burning. They shone down on the large, puffy form of Dane Tolfrey, lying strad-

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dled across the floor. There was a pungent reek of spirits.

"Dead!" exclaimed Barnes.

Timothy had dropped to his knees. He glanced up. "Not dead—just drunk himself stiff. Get the house physician."

The house physician's verdict was very definite. Dane Tolfrey was in an alcoholic stupor and was not likely to regain consciousness for at least twenty-four hours.

Timothy's face was very grave. "The man with all the dope—out cold. If he did this to escape cross-examination, it's one of the smartest things I ever came across . . . Let me know the moment he comes to, Barnes. I'll take care of the secretary."

Late though it was, Timothy hurried off to cope with this latest complication. Soon he was knocking at a third-floor door in a small apartment house. Madeleine Price opened to him, dressed in a surprisingly frivolous negligee.

"Mr. Trant," she said coldly. "What do you want?"

Timothy strolled into an austerely neat bed-living room. "What did Tolfrey say when he telephoned just now, Miss Price?"

"He seemed very drunk," said Madeleine. "He just wanted to make sure that no one but us two knew about that back entrance to the Advice Bureau."

More and more, Timothy was realizing that this maze of incongruities centered around Tolfrey and the back door. He dropped into a chair.

Timothy had not questioned the girl in detail that afternoon about the visitors. He had her run through the list again. She had recognized neither John Smith nor the nameless girl with the green eyes and, as far as she knew, none of the others had been regular clients of the Advice Bureau except Robert Bristol.

Timothy took Bristol's address and was just about to leave when the telephone jangled. Madeleine hurried to answer it. For a moment she listened, the color draining from her cheeks. Then, suddenly, Mrs. Van Heuten's superbly unemotional secretary crumpled in a heap on the floor.

Timothy's first instinct was to grasp the telephone. Frantically he told the operator to trace the call. Then he lifted Madeleine and carried her to a sofa. At length her eyelids fluttered and she gazed up at him from glazed, frightened eyes.

"That call," she whispered. "I couldn't tell from the voice whether it was a man or a woman. It was muffled, beastly. But it—it was the murderer!"

"He must have said something quite unusual to frighten as cool a person as yourself, Miss Price."

Madeline shivered. "It said—*'You'd better not tell the police about Tolfrey's visit to the Advice*

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Bureau this afternoon. I'd hate to have to kill another woman.'"

"So someone else besides Tolfrey is worried about that back door," said Timothy quietly.

"But"—Madeleine gestured impulsively—"I—I have been threatened and . . ."

"Don't worry, Miss Price. I'll send a man here right away to watch the apartment."

At that moment the telephone rang again. It was the operator to say that the last call had been put through from a public booth in the Times Square district.

Timothy moved to the door. "I don't have to warn you to be careful, Miss Price, do I? Good night."

One thing was very clear to Timothy. If it had really been the murderer who had threatened Madeleine Price over the phone, Dane Tolfrey, the most unaccountable of the visitors, could be definitely eliminated as a suspect. He had been alcoholically unconscious at the time of the call.

At nine o'clock next morning Timothy was standing outside an apartment door marked *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bristol.*

Bristol was the only traceable visitor to the Advice Bureau whom Timothy had not yet questioned.

The door was opened by a pale, untidy young man. His bright, excitable eyes widened as he saw Timothy's badge. He ushered him jerkily into an incredibly untidy living room.

"Excuse the mess." Bristol pulled a shirt and some socks from a chair. "I don't seem very good at keeping a place clean."

"How about the wife?"

"Wife!" Bristol laughed harshly. "I don't have a wife—not any more." He started to stride nervously up and down the room. "I suppose you want to talk to me about Clara's murder. That's funny, coming on top of everything else."

Mrs. Van Heuten's only proved literary client was obviously suffering under some acute mental strain. Timothy watched him intently. "And what do you mean by everything else, Mr. Bristol?"

Bristol snatched a cigarette. His voice was defiantly self-mocking. "I am a man of many woes. Despite great financial expectations, I've hardly a cent to my name. Yesterday my wife left me and wants a divorce so that she can marry a—a more promising husband. Yesterday my second novel was turned down by Salter's. And yesterday Mrs. Van Heuten, who was my only friend left in New York, was killed."

When brought to the point, Bristol answered Timothy's questions eagerly and intelligently. But he had nothing new to offer. Mrs. Van Heuten had been a friend of his mother's and had been extremely kind to him during his financial difficulties. He had heard no breath of scandal against her reputation,

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and, as an author, he was full of praise for her advice and the help she had given him in placing his first novel with Salter's. He knew no one who could have had a motive for killing Clara Van Heuten. Yes, he knew Tolfrey, but only vaguely as a friend of the murdered woman.

"Did Mrs. Van Heuten seem at all—worried when you talked with her?" asked Timothy.

Bristol shrugged. "Afraid I didn't notice. I was too busy pouring out my woes about Helen."

"Mrs. Van Heuten was sympathetic?"

"Very. Told me not to take life and my wife too seriously. Excellent advice if you can take it," he added rather bitterly.

"Perhaps," said Timothy, "you'd let me take that new novel Salter's turned down."

Bristol tossed him an untidy pile of manuscript. Timothy slipped the bundle under his arm. "Well, I think that's all for the moment."

Robert Bristol moved a little closer, his eyes misty. "Mrs. Van Heuten happened to be a very good friend of mine, Trant," he said quietly. "I think I'd do anything in this world to find out who murdered her. So if ever I could help—"

"Thanks," cut in Timothy. "As a matter of fact, there is one thing right now. What conclusions do you, as an author, draw from the following little anecdote? A newly married husband calls his wife long distance twice when he doesn't have anything to say?"

Bristol smiled wanly. "I'd say he was either very much in love—or suffering from a guilty conscience."

Timothy grinned. "That's exactly the way I had it figured out."

Being tactful, he did not set Bristol the rest of the conundrum: What did it mean when the wife in question kissed an absolutely strange policeman?

Bristol was making a desultory attempt to tidy up the room. A soiled shirt picked up from a table revealed a framed photograph of a girl—a rather attractive girl with a determined jaw.

"Your wife, Bristol?" asked Timothy.

"Yes. That's Helen." The boy's voice was toneless.

Timothy studied the photograph. "What color eyes does she have?" he asked.

"Why do you want to know?"

"I was just thinking how marvelous-looking she must be if they're this color." Timothy flicked out his light-green tie.

"No, they're a bit darker." Bristol's smile was mirthless.

Timothy had made a blind guess, but surely something in this case must fit. "Mind if I take this photograph?"

"Why should I mind who takes it?" muttered the young writer bleakly. "And if you want to find her, she works at Salter's. We met

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there when Mrs. Van Heuten helped me to place my first novel with them. She's gone back now, having found authors less profitable than publishers."

His words had been at once too caustic and too carefully indifferent. They convinced Timothy that Robert Bristol still passionately loved his truant wife.

Only two of the nine visitors remained to be located, and Timothy had an idea now where both of them might be found. On leaving Bristol's apartment he hurried to the offices of the *Evening Globe,* and there obtained a recently published photograph of John and Susan Hobart, after their wedding ceremony. From the *Globe* a taxi took Timothy to the apartment house where Madeleine Price lived.

The secretary was still pale and weary-looking, as if the shock of having been threatened by the murderer the night before still preyed on her nerves.

Timothy produced the photograph of Helen Bristol and that of the two Hobarts, and identified them. "Mean anything to you, Miss Price?"

Madeleine scrutinized them intently. She gave a little gasp. "Why, that girl—Mrs. Bristol—is the one who prophesied Mrs. Van Heuten's murder. And Mr. Hobart's the man who called himself John Smith. But how did you find out?"

"Mrs. Bristol was sheer luck," confessed Timothy. "Mr. Hobart was a combination of luck and guesswork. I figured out that he would never have called his wife long distance twice last night unless he had a guilty conscience. I connected a guilty conscience with Mrs. Van Heuten and an obvious alias like John Smith."

"But Mr. Hobart lives in Winton, Ohio, doesn't he?" asked the girl. "How—how could he have been in New York yesterday afternoon and then back in Winton last night?"

"You should be more air-minded. Mind if I use your phone?"

Timothy called the Newark airport. After a prolonged discussion with various voices, he discovered that a Mr. John Smith had arrived on the one-thirty plane from Winton and had left on the four fifteen. A hostess was unearthed who identified Timothy's rough description of Susan Hobart's husband as John Smith.

Timothy put down the receiver. "Well, Miss Price, if Mr. Hobart was the John Smith on the four-fifteen plane, he can hardly be involved in the murder. According to your admirable list, the Princess and her friends left the bureau at four fifteen. No one, however agile, could have stabbed Mrs. Van Heuten and dashed to the Newark airport in exactly no minutes."

"Then what are you going to do?" asked the girl uncertainly.

"I'm going to forget Mr. Smith and pay a little visit to Mrs. Helen

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Bristol at Salter's publishing house."

At Salter's, Timothy found Helen Bristol working on a book jacket in a small private office. She admitted quite frankly that she had visited the Advice Bureau around 4:30 the afternoon before. She had not bothered to inform the authorities because she had nothing of any significance to tell them.

"There, I differ," said Timothy quietly. "You're credited with the most sensational remark in the Van Heuten case. Some minutes before the body was found, you said to the secretary, *'Mrs. Van Heuten's stupid and cruel. One of these days someone will probably murder her for it.'* What made you so prophetic?"

"Well, it was about Bobby." Helen Bristol stabbed at a cigarette with a match. "Salter's published his first book. The other day he submitted his second novel to Mr. Graves, our chief editor. It was very bad and La—Larry had to turn it down. Bobby was here late yesterday afternoon to hear the news."

"But what's this got to do with Mrs. Van Heuten?"

"Everything." Helen Bristol's lips tightened. "I know how much it hurt Bobby to have the book turned down. And it hurt much more because Mrs. Van Heuten had always been praising him, telling him what a genius he was—especially when he used to have money."

She puffed at her cigarette as if she hated it. "While Bobby was here yesterday, I looked through the records and saw that Mrs. Van Heuten had written to Larry saying the book was bad. It made me angry to think of her raising Bobby's hopes and then going behind his back like that.

"You see, Bobby used to have a regular literary agent, the kind that are really useful to publishers and authors. They give a frank opinion on manuscripts and sell them when they're worth selling. But Bobby quit them for Mrs. Van Heuten's mushy praise—and double-crossing. In my opinion that woman ruined him both as an author and a person."

"And you felt that sufficient justification for going around to the Advice Bureau and prophesying murder?" murmured Timothy.

"Yes, I did."

"That was a very loyal thing for a wife to do, Mrs. Bristol—particularly when she'd asked for a divorce on the same day."

Helen Bristol's cheeks flushed; the green eyes gleamed dangerously. "What business is that of yours? I—well"—her voice faltered—"just because I want a divorce that doesn't mean I've stopped being fond of Bobby, does it? I am fond of him."

"And he happens to be very much in love with you."

Helen Bristol mangled her ciga-

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rette in an ashtray. "Don't you think I haven't thought of him as well as myself? Our marriage was a mistake. It should never have happened. But Bobby was always around and I was just foolish—that's all. And I don't believe in patching up something that doesn't work."

"You're a very materialistic young woman, Mrs. Bristol."

"I have enough sense not to make a martyr of myself. Besides, I—I'm in love with someone else."

"Mr. Larry Graves, the chief editor here?"

Helen Bristol's eyes widened. "How did you know?"

"Masculine intuition." Timothy grinned. "Incidentally, Mrs. Bristol, is Bobby willing to give you a divorce?"

"He is." The girl laughed shortly. "With a rather ill grace, though. He wrote me a violent letter yesterday about it." Impulsively she opened her pocketbook and tossed Timothy a single sheet.

He read:

"Dear Helen:

"I haven't any idea how much a divorce costs, but, whatever the price, it'll be cheap. I know you don't entertain a very lofty opinion of Mrs. Van Heuten's intelligence. But she was intelligent enough to point out several interesting facts when I saw her just before going round to Salter's this afternoon. When we were married, I had prospects of becoming a very rich man. When you asked for a divorce, those prospects no longer existed.

"Apparently neither you nor Mr. Graves has a particularly lofty opinion of me as a novelist. But it seems more desirable to be like me, unsuccessful in selling my novels, than to be like you, successful in selling yourself. Robert Bristol"

Timothy put the letter in his pocket. "You don't mind my keeping this?"

"Whatever for?"

"It shows that Mrs. Van Heuten was circulating rather unpleasant rumors about you." Timothy smiled. "If ever we need one, it gives you a motive for wanting to kill her."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Mrs. Bristol.

"Being ridiculous is part of my job, Mrs. Bristol. Good morning—I feel sure I'll be seeing you again."

That afternoon Timothy had a packed session at headquarters with Sergeant Danvers and the Chief. Danvers, who was working with Jervis, had very little to report. No sneak thieves had been seen in the neighborhood of the Advice Bureau. No one in the building had noticed anyone going in through the back entrance—not even Tolfrey.

The Advice Bureau's files had substantiated the fact that Robert Bristol alone of the nine visitors was listed as a client, although so-

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cially Mrs. Van Heuten had been on quite friendly terms with the four ladies and their respective husbands. Barnes, who had been switched from the Regina pending Tolfrey's return to sobriety, had been investigating the dead woman's past. He had unearthed nothing disreputable.

Timothy gave a full report, but was still unable to show any logical sequence to his findings. He merely stated that he was certain that Mrs. Van Heuten had been running some profitable but discreet racket, that Tolfrey had been involved, and that all nine strangely assorted visitors, with the possible exception of the two Bristols, were somehow connected with it.

"As soon as I can," he concluded, "I'll fly out to Winton, Ohio, for a talk with John Hobart, alias Smith. But at the moment our safest bet is to wait for Tolfrey to sober up."

As he spoke, Inspector Jervis hurried in. He brought the startling news that, although the murdered woman had been virtually penniless five years previously, her estate was well over $250,000. This prosperity could not be accounted for by the Advice Bureau, which had not even paid its way.

"Looks as though Trant's racket theory's right," admitted the Chief.

"But that's not all," Jervis said. "Most of Mrs. Van Heuten's property goes to relatives in Boston, but she left $25,000 to Dane Tolfrey and $25,000 to the secretary. And we know they both had the opportunity to commit the crime."

The Chief glanced sharply at Timothy. "What do you make of that, Trant?"

Timothy grinned. "I'm absolutely certain Tolfrey didn't do it. As for Madeleine Price, well, it's possible, of course. I always felt she could commit murder given the right motive. But, somehow, I don't think $25,000 is quite the right motive."

Back in his own office, Timothy ran through the preliminary reports which Jervis' men had compiled on Mrs. Van Heuten's various visitors. There was nothing to be learned, although the Inspector's thoroughness had included even the husbands of the Princess and her friends. With the exception of John Hobart, these gentlemen seemed to have no connection whatsoever with the case.

Prince Walonski was in Europe; Miss Dawn's husband, whom she was about to divorce, was acting in a play in London; Miss Kennet's spouse, a young archeologist, was unearthing primitive shrines in Tahiti.

Dane Tolfrey's dossier revealed that he ran a rather desultory financial investigation service which took up that part of his time not spent in bars, at race tracks, or on frequent trips to Europe.

Timothy was skimming the report when Jervis hurried in.

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The Inspector groaned. "Listen to what Barnes unearthed. The day before the murder the Princess bought four revolvers."

"Well, four revolvers or forty revolvers don't prove anything in this case," said Timothy. "After all, poor Clara was stabbed with a paper knife."

But he was really quite interested in those revolvers. They fitted in very nicely with a nebulous theory beginning to form in his mind.

When he returned to his apartment at six fifteen, Timothy found a telegram:

HAVE SOLVED LUDICROUSLY SIMPLE PROBLEM OF CLARA'S MURDER STOP HAVE INVITED ALL SUSPECTS INCLUDING MURDERER TO CELEBRATE MY RETURN SOBRIETY STOP IT MIGHT AMUSE YOU STOP COCKTAILS REGINA HOTEL, SIX THIRTY. DANE TOLFREY.

Timothy cursed under his breath. What a fool he'd been not to have warned Jervis to keep Barnes at the Regina. He should have guessed, when Madeleine received her threatening call, that Tolfrey had some vital information about the murderer. And what a fool Tolfrey was, letting the murderer know he had the solution.

When Timothy hurried into the large foyer of the Regina Hotel, he instantly noticed an untidy figure at the Information Desk.

"Hello, Bobby."

"Tolfrey's solved the murder!" Robert Bristol smiled excitedly and indicated a telegram in his hand. "Did you know?"

"I did," said Timothy grimly.

The elevator shot them to the sixth floor. Timothy, followed closely by Bristol, hurried down the corridor to Tolfrey's door. It was half open. Timothy pushed his way into the apartment. In the living room a table displayed glasses and two cocktail shakers. But neither Tolfrey nor anyone else was present.

"I'll have a look around, Bristol," snapped Timothy. "You wait here."

Swiftly he moved into the bedroom, shutting the door behind him. As he stood there, tensed, he heard a faint sound emanating from the bathroom—the steady gurgle of running water.

He hurried to the dark opening of the bathroom door. The tiles were wet beneath his feet. He fumbled for the light switch. As the room sprang into illumination, he stood staring for one dazed instant at the thing in front of him. Then he moved over the wet tiles to the bath.

There, stiffly, almost deliberately posed, lay Dane Tolfrey, his arms straight at his sides, his head propped grotesquely against the edge of the tub. He was fully, meticulously dressed as for some social occasion. His lips were half open, and his eyes bulged blindly forward in a senseless, idiot stare.

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Timothy gripped the heavy shoulders and pushed them forward, revealing the back. The coat was ripped and stained. Blood trickled down—vivid crimson in contrast to the vivid whiteness of the bath. And, against the porcelain, its blade wet and dulled, was a knife.

Timothy let the body fall back into place. His glance swerved to the wash basin. Both spigots had been left full on, and the waste pipe was closed. Water was pouring over the porcelain rim, dripping onto the floor.

As he stood there, his fingers trembled with anger. He had made one mistake and the murderer had taken advantage of it.

(*continued on page 132*)

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
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de Ford, Miriam Allen	MURDERERS SANE & MAD	Abelard-Schuman Ltd.	$5.00	4/29
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AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
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Davis, Gordon	WHERE MURDER WAITS	Gold Medal (Orig.)	$ .40	4/29
Pearson, Edmund	FIVE MURDERS: WITH A FINAL NOTE ON THE BORDEN CASE	Dolphin Books	$ .95	5/7

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A character study written with lancet-nib and acid-ink . . . Marjorie Riddell can do this kind of story exceptionally well. (Do you remember her "Social Call" in EQMM's August 1964 issue?)

HERBERT'S GONE A-FISHING

by MARJORIE RIDDELL

HOW COULD THEY DO THIS TO ME? DO THEY IMAGINE I CAN ENJOY *watching television when I've no one to talk to?*

Call themselves friends! Herbert would never just sit around fishing all this time if it weren't for his so-called friends. He would never leave me alone like this. He's far too fond of me. "I'll be back late this afternoon," he said. He promised. And now it's early evening. And I have no one to talk to.

It's getting quite dark. How can you fish in the dark? Surely fish go to sleep?

Good heavens, the whole point of Herbert's retiring was so that we could spend all our time together. And then those men at the club make him join their angling group! How on earth do they think we can spend all our time together if they make him take up fishing when I don't like fishing?

Of course, he must have some sort of hobby. There's no point in his just hanging around doing nothing while I'm cooking and looking after the house. But he could easily do something indoors, or in the garden. Then I could talk to him. And I don't mean the cellar. What's the good of his having a hobby in the cellar if he keeps the cellar door locked? I can't talk to him through a locked door. I simply don't care if it is going to be a surprise for me.

I don't want surprises like that. I just want him to be here with me. I wonder if any of the other men have come back yet?

I think I'll ring the club.

Hello? Is that the secretary? This is Mrs. Tomlinson. Could you tell me when the fishing contest is expected to be over, please? The fishing contest this afternoon—

What? Next week?

Oh, no, it's today.

Yes, it *is* today. Really, I ought to know. My husband is taking part in it.

Yes, I know it's your contest, and frankly I'm surprised you've got the date wrong. I should have thought that if anyone knew it was today you

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would. My husband went *today* to take part in it. I said, "Goodbye, dear," and he said, "Goodbye, dear," and then he went.

Yes, it is today! Good heavens, I made him sandwiches! They had to take sandwiches for their lunch. I made him chicken with mushrooms and tomatoes. And salt and pepper, of course. And a piece of chocolate cake. But that was hours ago. He said he'd be back this afternoon. What time was the contest due to finish?

Hello? Hello, I've been cut off, hello?

Oh, hello, who is this?

The barman? Why have I been put through to the barman?

It's Mrs. Tomlinson. I'm trying to find out where my husband is, but you won't know him, he doesn't dr—

Oh? How is that, what do you mean, you know him very well?

Oh, pointed out to you. Really?

Yes, I'll hold on . . .

Yes, I know he isn't in the club at the moment. I thought you were finding out if anyone had seen him. Has anyone come back from the fishing contest yet?

Yes, yes, I know all about that, they've got the dates wrong. Really, I've never heard anything like it. I suppose you'll be telling me next there wasn't any fishing outing last week, and the week before that!

Yes, there was! Whatever is the matter with—

Well, that's better. Of course there was. Really, I've never heard of such confusion. First you say there weren't any outings and now you say there were. What kind of club are you running, for heaven's sake? I'm glad my husband has resigned.

Yes, at the end of the month. I wrote the letter for him myself just the other day. He'll be well out of it. And another thing—

What? Oh, yes, I understand, I'm sure you're busy. But it's a pity you couldn't work just a little harder at keeping your records straight. Well, I won't keep you then. But when they come back from the contest, will you ring me, please? The secretary has our number. Then I'll know he's on his way home. Thank you. Goodbye.

Well, really! What a club. Fishing must be pretty stupid!

Oh, how could they keep him out like this! Why should it happen to me? After all the trouble I went to with his sandwiches. All the care, and thought, and consideration—I think it was very unselfish of me when I didn't even want him to go. Fishing!

Gardening would have been nice. He could have done it on nice sunny days when I could sit out there and talk to him. It's a pity he gave it up after only two days. And after all that digging, too. Such a big hole. I had

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no idea you needed such a long deep hole for roses. Fancy having to put all their roots straight down. I would never have known that if Herbert hadn't read it in a book.

But he was silly to be so cross because I told Mr. Gregson. I was only trying to help. Mr. Gregson has some lovely roses next door and Herbert has never done any gardening in his life. He was hurt, I suppose. He really did look quite upset when he came home and saw Mr. Gregson looking at his hole.

But I don't think Mr. Gregson need have been quite so blunt. It wasn't very kind to say right out that it was a funny sort of hole for roses, and the wrong part of the garden besides. Poor Herbert. It's such a nasty, dark, damp corner—roses would have been just right there. Or anything else, for that matter.

But it was just a little bit childish of him to fill it all in again, and very silly to sulk the way he did. Perhaps I shouldn't have come out to tell him so. But after all that work! Days of digging, all for nothing. I'm sure he could have planted something *in it.*

What we really want, of course, is something we can do together. Like boating. That was a lovely idea. Herbert rowing, and me sitting there, soaking in the sun. Fancy him arranging it specially as a treat for me on his birthday. What a lovely sunny day it was. And such a very pretty dress. And then to have it ruined! They shouldn't be allowed to rent boats that aren't balanced properly.

Poor Herbert—what a shock for him, after he'd planned it all so carefully. I shall never forget his face in those first few terrible moments when we grabbed hold of the upturned boat. He really looked quite ill when I was telling him the little joke I made to Mrs. Gregson when I saw her in the garden. "Isn't it a lucky thing," I said, "that I used to be such a good swimmer? You never forget, you know."

How on earth can they be catching fish at this hour? I think I'll ring Mr. Gregson.

Oh, hello, Mrs. Gregson. It's Mrs. Tomlinson. Is Mr. Gregson there?

Well, I just wanted to ask him something about fishing.

Well, because Herbert's gone fishing, and I thought Mr. Gregson might know something about—

Oh, doesn't he? Never done any fishing? Still, he's a man, isn't he? Could I speak to him, please?

My new curtains? Why, how kind of you. Fancy you noticing. I liked the color, you know. I've always had a good eye for color. I think that's important for furnishings. I do like my house to look nice. May I speak to Mr. Gregson, please?

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Why, thank you, but it's not a new style. I've worn my hair like this for ages. May I speak to—

No, they weren't delivering anything new. It was a chair we had sent away to be re-upholstered. That's another thing Herbert could do, some sort of do-it-yourself. Or stamp collecting. That would be better than fishing.

No, I certainly don't want him to watch football. What's the good of football? I don't like football. We want something nice and quiet that he can do in the house. Ceramics, for instance. That would be nice. He could make little pots. And yet if he did that I suppose I'd have mud all over the place. And that would be worse than fishing tackle. You get worn out just putting it away.

Yes, he does, he leaves it lying around everywhere. Rods, baskets, twine, all over the house. Really, they're like children, aren't they? I had to be quite firm about it. "Now," I said, "you go and pick up that twine from the top of the stairs and put it away at once!" May I speak to Mr. Gregson, please?

Yes, I'll hold on . . .

Poor Herbert, he was quite upset when I made him put his things away. But it really was too much. And I've put up with him down in that cellar for days on end, digging and digging and messing about. Damp beastly place. Secret, indeed! What good will it do me? That's what I'd like to know. How can I talk to him down in the cellar?

Oh, hello, Mr. Gregson. I know you don't actually do any fishing, but would you just tell me something about it? You see—

What do you mean, why? I'm just wondering if anyone would be fishing at this time of the evening, in the dark.

What do you mean, why? Herbert went out fishing hours ago, that's why, and he should be back—

Oh, do they? In the dark?

The best time?

Yes, but for how long?

Depends on what?

On how they're drifting? Oh.

You mean it could go on for quite a long time yet?

No, I've no idea whereabouts on the river he's gone. Apparently you don't know until you get there and find out where the fish are. Apparently that could be anywhere, and there are miles and miles—

Yes, but I can't help worrying. It's all very well telling me not to—I mean, he said he'd be back this afternoon.

Yes, but he would have let me know—

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Yes, I know there aren't any telephones along the riverbank, but—

Oh, well, all right. I'll just have dinner and try to have a nice evening all alone by myself.

What? Go to bed? But he can't be as late as that—

What fish? What kind of fish can you catch only late at night?

Herrings?

Really? In our river?

Oh, do you think he would? Well, I never—a surprise for my breakfast! You know, that would be just like Herbert. Now, why didn't I think of that myself? I certainly do like herrings. You can fry them, of course, but what I do is split them down the middle, and then stuff them with chopped—

Yes, all right then, I won't keep you. Oh, how kind you've been. You really have relieved my mind.

Well, thank you again, Mr. Gregson. Goodbye.

Oh, why ever didn't I think of that? Of course he's doing it as a surprise for me! Just like the cellar. Poor, dear Herbert, sitting on that riverbank for hours in the pitch-darkness catching herrings for my breakfast.

Oh, how glad I am I put those mushrooms in his sandwiches. It was right for him to have the first ones. I'm not a bit ashamed I took the cellar key while he was asleep and went to see how they were coming along.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 277th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . It is a curiously academic (and academically curious) story about—to quote from one of the author's letters to your Editors—a "catch-as-catch-can sadist, an opportunistic bully who senses a supposedly weaker person." The other aspects—counter-motives, characterizations, mood, and perhaps most important in this story, the curious and academic implications—we leave to your own reading and reacting . . .

The author has told us comparatively little about himself—an interesting reticence. He was born in Bangor, Pennsylvania, was graduated from New York University, is married and has one daughter, and earns his living as an accountant for a large corporation. And that is all—no, one more fact: his chief spare-time interests are reading and writing.

But what of the man inside? Perhaps we'll learn more from his future stories . . .

WINTER SAVORY

by HENRY T. PARRY

January 27: THE DOCTOR SAYS I shall be able to get up in a day or two. The danger of any congestion seems past. It was the three-hour exposure after I came out of the water rather than the shock of falling in.

We—Miss Helen Walters, Dr. Bernie Pornn, and I—were in the Tinicum Marshes where the tidal creeks come in. Bernie was standing on a low bank at the edge of an inlet and he called me to come and inspect a series of nests in the earth just below the lip of the bank. Swallows, I thought.

As I reached the water's edge I tripped—over what I cannot even now say although I have unpleasant doubts. Driftwood perhaps, or a tree limb; but the only stick I could see was the one Bernie always carries on our birdwatching trips—an ash sapling from which he has peeled the bark in an unpleasant diamond-backed pattern, a kind of stiff vegetable snake.

I plunged into the inlet. It was waist-deep and paralyzingly cold. I

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was illogically reminded of those dreadful times during the war when one was irrevocably committed to danger from which there was no escape. I was in no danger since the tide was low but I fear I presented a ludicrous spectacle.

I sloshed up on the bank, feeling the January chill settle quickly within me. Bernie, choking with laughter, offered me a drink from that flask he always carries but I was already sufficiently upset without that. Miss Walters was sympathetic, as always, and pooh-poohed Bernie's suggestion that we build a fire, pointing out that it would take days to dry out my clothes. I was relieved since I could see no way in which I could have disrobed without embarrassment.

By the time we had returned to the car I was shaking uncontrollably. I rolled up in a tarp and somehow survived the three-hour drive back to school.

Our birdwatching trips were of much greater pleasure to me before Bernie became part of our Audubon group. It was I who introduced him to the local Society when he came here from New England. Since we were both members of the Biology Department and it was apparent from his talk that he was an expert in natural history—indeed, there are some, although I am not one, who feel he should publish on peregrine hawks—I felt it incumbent upon me to help him get started in the community, at least in the limited social milieu in which I live. My teaching and writing do not permit me to enjoy any but a circumscribed social life—which may be why I set such store on our birdwatching trips with Miss Walters and the others.

Rather than spend my time putting down these notes, I had far better be working on my new book. I cannot hope that it will be as successful as my little work on botany which, although its sale was small, as expected, did bring me some letters of appreciation from deCamp and Goldman. This self-indulgence in writing about myself is perhaps excusable: I rarely talk to anyone outside of class hours and it has been a week now since I have been confined to bed.

I find myself hoping that Miss Walters might drop in on her way home from classes, but I have no justifiable basis for such a wish. For one whose discipline lies in the field of the classics she has shown an exceptional aptitude for natural history, a capacity which is clearly demonstrated on our Saturday trips with the Audubon group.

I have always preferred the woods, swamps, and beaches to the company of most humans, but I do find the people of the local Audubon organization to be most congenial. I am formulating a theory that people who take a deep interest in nature are most often friendly and kind and superior to the common run. Thoreau has been my idol

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since I was twelve, which is all the more unusual when you consider that my father named me Henry David Thoreau Waitely. After his father.

My theory breaks down on Bernie Pornn, however. As dogs can hear a whistle whose frequency is too high for the human ear, so am I able, as a result of my childhood experiences, to detect the secret bully and torturer when others might be unaware. A year and a half behind my class in age and physical development and (it was thought) three years ahead in mental achievement, I learned early to spot those who delight in the physical humiliation of the weak in body.

Even now I remember so well the progressive rituals of the playground bullies and I am still distressed at my memories—not because of the physical pain and the humiliation but because of my failure to do my best to kill my tormentors on the spot, with fist, claw, and stone in vengeful frenzy.

Nor does the urge to torture the weak wither at maturity: adults are simply more practiced in deceiving. I recognize Bernie for what he is, and since I am what I am, I can only continue a watchful passive resistance.

On the other hand my fall may have been accidental.

But I do not think it was.

May 18: Once more I am in bed writing these notes. I am becoming like one of the characters in the Greek plays that Miss Walters reads with her classes, pursued by the Fates and fleeing to inevitable doom. Except in my case the Fates are personified by a middle-aged biology professor who takes time from his research on the protein molecule to indulge in some highly dangerous pastimes.

Eight or nine of us from the Audubon group had gone down to the Widener preserve on the Cape. Miss Walters rode with me, and Bernie drove alone. The others were parked and waiting by the time Miss Walters and I arrived.

Someone had already set up the butts for archery practice. A few of us spend an hour or so shooting when we come out of the woods. I have acquired a modest proficiency with the fifty-five-pound bow.

Bernie was already busy with breakfast preparations, claiming to be the best tailgate chef east of the Rockies. The rest of us went off birding, leaving him alone at his work.

Two hours later when we came out of the woods, breakfast was waiting. Although I am by no means possessed of a cultivated palate, I do take an intelligent interest in well-prepared food, and Bernie was as good a cook as he had always boasted of being.

"To those of you who noticed the rare artistry with which I blended chives in the omelette," Bernie announced, "I must point out that you

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are indebted to Johnny Appleseed Thoreau here who kindly furnished them from his herb garden."

I recognized, as the others did not, that Bernie's comment was intended to ridicule rather than to tease good-naturedly; but I kept silent.

I decided to forego the archery practice and joined the others in helping Bernie pack the equipment in his station wagon. As we moved back and forth I was aware of a growing but controlled excitement in his manner. His actions had always had a certain inner intensity, as though he were driven by some secret compulsion—as indeed he is. I thought, as we handed him the cooking gear, that he was like some medicine-show pitchman packing up his tent and leaving town before the city fathers descended upon him. I noticed, too, that his hands had those ground-in grease stains as though he had changed a tire along the road.

"Helen," he turned to Miss Walters, "why don't you ride home with me, thus bestowing your favors equally between the learned Doctor Waitely and myself. I seem to have lost or mislaid my glasses, and I am no good at all at distance vision. You would be placing me in your debt forever if you would drive my car home while I sit beside you and regale you with stories of great dishes I have cooked. In those days I was without benefit of Friend Appleseed's magic herbs and spells."

That was the way it came out, and in view of what happened it is most fortunate.

On these trips we make no attempt to drive in convoy—partly, I suspect, because I drive so slowly that the others become nervous. We were separated before we reached the turnpike. I had taken up a position in the outside lane and got up to what I consider a safe maximum speed, about 45, when it happened.

The car lurched sharply left. I wrenched the wheel over, and the front of the car dropped with a screech—like the sound of a giant fingernail on a blackboard. The back rose as if to somersault over the front, and then slammed back to the road. The car changed ends, rolled twice, and slid to a stop against the highway fence.

I unhooked the seatbelt and climbed out, my head numb with a kind of frozen headache. Deliberately I laid myself down by the roadside, knowing that I was going to faint. With the irrelevance that accompanies stress, I noted the young hollyhocks growing by the road. Waves of nausea swept over me.

Two cars pulled up—a fact which, even in my convulsed state, I noted with surprise since I believed all turnpike drivers left immobile persons to die. The last

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thing I remember was the clump of approaching shoes . . .

At the hospital they decided I had a concussion and after four days sent me home with the recommendation that I remain in bed for a few more days—where I now am, writing this.

"Funny thing, Dr. Waitely," said the garage man who had towed my car from the highway to the junkyard. "I found both front wheels lying along the road. I couldn't find any of the nuts and bolts that are supposed to hold them on. But with these crack-ups you never know."

That may be—but I know. I know Bernard Pornn is trying to kill me, that my seeming mildness and other-worldliness act as a catalyst to his savage, aggressive nature. I have nothing he could possibly covet: his academic rank is as good as mine; his future is certainly brighter if you measure it by money and worldly recognition (he will most certainly, after reaching a certain point in his research, give up teaching and take a job with a large industrial lab); my tentative relationship with Miss Walters surely provides no motive since his interest in her seems no more significant than his interest in the other female members of the college community.

I can only conclude that he is trying to kill me for two reasons: one, he regards me as a natural victim, and the violence and aggression in his nature are building up to the climactic stroke, the ultimate dominance of denying life to another; and two, he thinks he can get away with it.

My defense remains what it has always been. A true man has no need to retaliate. He need only endure.

June 29: I am sickened and ashamed—sickened at the senseless violence in the human spirit, and ashamed of the response in kind within myself. This is what has happened:

I have considered myself fortunate, in view of my interests, to have such desirable quarters as those I live in over Mr. Berko's garage. The garage had been a stable and I am living in the rooms that Mr. Berko's grandfather's coachman occupied 70 years ago.

The chief attraction for me, however, is the garden. Mr. Berko has kindly permitted me to use the ground behind the stable, part of which I devote to my experiment on the American fern and part to flowers and part—my particular pleasure—to an herb garden. I grow some of the commoner cooking herbs—such as chives, summer savory, rosemary, dill, and basil, all of which I dry and then present to those faculty wives who will make proper use of them.

I store the dried plants in little green bottles which I keep on a shelf in my kitchen, each neatly labeled

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with those bittersweet names. As a pedagogic joke, intended only for the knowing, I keep among them a similar green bottle, securely stoppered and sealed with wax, and demurely marked *Winter Savory*, and, in red, *S. Taxifera*. The plant had been given to me originally by one of my graduate students who had worked in South America.

In the center of my alloted space is a tiny plot of grass where I have mounted the mist net which I use to snare birds for banding. At the far end I have built a crude arbor over which I have trained grapevines. When the dusk is settling and I can no longer see for gardening, I sit there and contemplate my work. I think how Horace would have approved of this retreat—no Sabine Farm perhaps, but a place of beauty, work, and the green promise of growing things. In the sifting darkness the place is graced by the pure notes of a brown thrush.

Classes were over for the school year and I had spent the early twilight hours in the swamp south of town watching the redwinged blackbirds. It was dark when I returned to my office at the school, where I worked until 10:30. When I got home I went immediately to bed, foregoing my usual interlude of sitting in the garden.

Next morning I found my garden ruined.

It was as if an elephant had gone berserk. Every growing thing had been uprooted, pushed down, and trampled. The vines had been ripped from the arbor whose posts leaned at crazy angles. My herbs lay withering in the June sun.

I rushed from place to place, discovering the wreckage of my work, in unbelieving consternation that such meaningless destruction could take place where all had been order and beauty. But the most telling manifestation of the evil that had ruined my garden was the dead thrush, still enmeshed in the mist net, but ground into the turf under an insane foot.

That this man had tried to kill me seemed suddenly of no great significance in comparison with the enormity of his new offense. This man had destroyed plant life. He had wantonly killed a bird. His violent nature had erupted and caused him to upset the ordained flow and balance of nature. He had destroyed order, peace, and seclusion.

Oh, I knew it was Bernard Pornn who had done this senseless thing —for under the trampled mist net was that odious ash sapling that he carried, with its sinister diamond-backed pattern cut into the bark.

In describing their behavior in moments of stress people often say, "I didn't know how long I sat there." I knew how long I sat there. It was until I knew exactly what I had to do and precisely how I had to do it. I had turned and run for the last time.

I had no hunting arrows but it

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was no problem to remove the blunt target tip and replace it with the filed-down stainless-steel blade of a paring knife. I opened my green bottle labeled *Winter Savory* and coated the tip of my homemade arrow. In all honesty I must state that my sense of shame and disgust vanished and that I grew calmer and began to hum as I completed my preparations to rid the world of the evil that was Bernard Pornn.

A bow and arrow! It was fitting and seemly. If John James Audubon had ever been required to do what I was required to do, I doubt that he would have used a gun, expert shot though he must have been.

That night I approached the parking lot behind Bernie's apartment house through Niemeyer's Woods and took up a position in the shrubbery that edged the low wall around the lot. Bernie always put his car in his allotted space, nosed up to the wall, and he generally came home from the library shortly before ten. The range was not more than fifteen feet, and I could not miss.

When he pulled in and climbed out of the car, I rose silently from the shrubbery and pulled the bowstring taut. I was about to release the arrow when Bernie abruptly swung open the door between us, climbed in, and backed out. I experienced no letdown; rather I saw how simple it would be if one were patient. And impatient botanists are rare.

The next night, when his car lights flicked out, I drew the arrow back to its head. He locked the door and stood directly facing the wall, his head bent over the car keys. The arrow hit him squarely in front, between the ribs.

He coughed, turned around, traced one hand uncertainly along the side of his car, and walked slowly across the lot. His walk broke into slow lurches; then he fell, first to his knees and finally to his hands. He crawled the length of one car, pitched forward, raised himself once, and then fell forward for the last time.

I watched for a few minutes, but the darkness and silence of the lot were unbroken. Not the least of the advantages of a bow and arrow as a weapon is its silence.

As I faded back through the woods I heard in the foliage overhead the eight accented notes of a barred owl.

June 30: Someone—I believe it was Ambrose Bierce—began a story with a sentence which reads: "Early one June morning in 1872 I murdered my father—an act which made a deep impression on me at the time."

I thought of it when I walked early this June morning to the police station to confess to the murder of Bernard Pornn. I had waited until the news announcements covered it and had noted that nothing was said of the arrow or of the fact

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that the incident had occurred in the parking lot.

I was taken into the office of Mr. Conley, the head of our small detective force. I had had his son in one of my classes. When I told him that I wished to confess to killing Bernard Pornn, he looked at me as though I had told him that I had books overdue at the library. He began to speak, thought better of it, and beckoned in an elderly police officer who sat down behind me at a typewriter.

I gave the usual information and then said that at nine o'clock last evening I had overtaken Dr. Pornn while he was walking near the Gorham Labs and had struck him down with my walking stick, leaving him unconscious or dead, and I didn't care which. I heard the typewriter slow up at this, but at a glance from Mr. Conley the transcription proceeded.

I explained that my "voices" had urged me—commanded me, really—to do this and that it could be put off no longer. I heard the scratch of a match as the typist lit a cigarette.

Mr. Conley thanked me and said in his kind voice that since he knew me and could always find me if there were any further questions, there would be no need in view of the circumstances to hold me. In the meantime, considering my recent car accident, he suggested that I consult my doctor and explain this incident to him—especially about my voices telling me to do such things as hit people over the head.

I carefully explained that my voices had always cautioned me against doctors, but nonetheless I would consider carefully what he had advised. I told him if he should need me that day I would be birding in the swamp south of town.

July 14: Once more my health forces me into retirement and I must make the most of my leisure to bring these notes up-to-date and then get back to my serious work.

After talking to Mr. Conley, I made an appointment with Dr. Danslit, the school psychiatrist, and told him how my voices had urged me to cleanse the world of Bernard Pornn.

"Well, well," seemed all that he could muster at the moment, but as I filled in the details there were barely audible murmurs of "Classic, classic." I also thought I could detect signs of relief at his being presented with an orthodox assembly of symptoms.

I explained how Bernie had tripped me into the water, how he had loosened my car wheels. I thought it best not to mention what had finally caused me to pass sentence and proceed with the execution—the destruction of life and beauty in my garden. (As I write this, it suddenly occurs to me: is it possible I was jealous of Bernie's growing attentions to Miss Walters? Absurd. Surely that was no part of my motive.)

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"It is my opinion, Dr. Waitely," he said, "that you and I should go to your house and pack a bag, and then drive out to Fairview. I will enter you for rest and treatment, and perhaps we may have you in shape for the fall term."

Which is how I come to be in residence here at Fairview. I find it, strangely enough, more congenial than the uninitiated would think. I have my writing to occupy me; there are sessions with the psychiatrists—I tell them my "voices" are becoming more infrequent and they now chide me only over the slow progress I am making with my book; and best of all, there are visits from Miss Walters—dear, faithful Helen who, nonetheless, I sometimes catch regarding me with deep question. She reports no advance in the solving of the Pornn case.

I mentioned several times to her how bland the food is here and finally suggested that she bring out the herbs and seasonings from the shelf in my kitchen. Not knowing those most suitable, she brought all my green bottles, including the one, no longer wax-sealed, with the label: *Winter Savory;* not, of course, *Satureia Hortensis* or summer savory but *Strychnos Taxifera,* or curare. To see it among the honest jars of dill and basil is like seeing a cobra waving among the irises.

Even dear, faithful Helen does not realize that one of the lesser-known perquisites of being a somewhat withdrawn professor of botany is that you can get away with murder.

Next is the 278th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, and the second "first story" to appear in EQMM in verse form.

Meredith Roberts was 16 years old ("soon to be 17") when she was given a high-school English assignment to write a poem. So being a "great mystery fan" (along with her mother and father), she decided to "make it a mystery." The poem, originally titled "Citizen's Crime Commission," appeared in the March 1963 issue of the Wyandotte High School's mimeographed literary publication, "Et Cetera" (Kansas City, Kansas)—"an amateur production," Miss Roberts reminded us, "of quite limited circulation."

In reply to our inquiry, Miss Roberts informed us that she plays flute in the high school orchestra, belongs to the Story-Telling Club, Great Books Club, Pep Club, Kay Cees, Future Teachers, Student Council, and is a "Shark" in the Splash Club (girls swim club). She

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loves it all (to quote from her letter), and as a typical teen-ager (of the feminine gender) she also loves clothes, hair styles, and the Beatles (remember them?). Her "burning ambition," at the time she wrote the poem, was to attend either Smith or Wellesley . . . The best of luck, Meredith!

THE BUTLER DID IT

by MEREDITH ROBERTS

A gun found in the river;
A body found there, too.
The bullets checked out nicely,
As bullets often do.

But while police were checking
On this, their only clue,
The people of the city
Questioned the to-do.

You ask of them, "Who did it?"
They'll answer till they're hoarse,
"You mean you haven't solved it?
The butler, dear, of course."

The butler always does it,
I saw it on TV.
Police don't understand that!
A simple case for me!

The next day when the coppers
Bring in the man's best friend,
Of course, his name is Butler,
And that's the livin' end.

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Celery Green, emulating his prototype, has now become a series character. Here is the second of his merrie adventures in England—another sleuthian spoof about the debonair dilettante detective who, we freely admit, is criminologically close to your Editors' heart . . .

THE INDIAN DIAMOND MYSTERY

by ARTHUR PORGES

WHEN AN ENGLISH CRIMINAL takes a long look at himself in a mirror, sees that he is puny, furtive, and not very successful at his profession, he usually becomes an informer. No practical person, however illiterate, fights fate. If he's a Cockney, and a fast man with the soothing word "Guv'nor," his future is assured, and it remains only to attach himself to a particular detective—one important enough to have an adequate expense account—to whom he becomes an exclusive source of information.

It was from such an auxiliary that Inspector Dewe East received one of the best tips in his career: that Fanfaron Mironton, the famous international jewel thief, who stole the hundred thousand guineas Indian Diamond—almost another Koh-i-noor—had a room at the Goat and Barometer, a typical English inn, as evidenced by the name which had driven several generations of etymologists and assorted philologists mad.

"H'i tell you, Guv'nor—H'i mean H'Inspector H'East, sir—'e's there, orl right. An' 'e 'as the bloomin' stone with 'im."

"Smashing!" East boomed, his large rosy-cheeked face full of joy. The tip couldn't have come at a more crucial moment in his career, and might prove his salvation. "If I can collar Mironton, Slimy, my lad—*and* the Indian Diamond—that promotion is as good as mine. Inspector South will come a cropper."

"Right, Guv'nor," the little informer agreed, twitching and looking about furtively. It had taken him some time to learn this—every trade has its tricks. At first, he had looked East squarely in the eye, palm out, ready for cash—all business. Now he knew better. Scotland Yard had a lot more faith in a tip delivered in a rambling manner, interrupted by frequent sidelong glances and an occasional cringe. It was good technique even to break off every so often in the middle of a report, and sidle away, looking scared. Later you said a member of the Mob had spotted you and it was a ruddy near thing—Guv'nor. Sometimes that netted Slimy an extra shilling.

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But now Inspector East handed him a quid, a bob, and a tanner, and the stool pigeon slunk away. It wasn't often that he made such a profitable coup; better yet was the knowledge that only a Frenchman had been betrayed, and no English crook would be waiting for Slimy with a potato full of old razor blades. Sometimes the informer got badly cut up after a tip, but small wiry Cockneys are almost indestructible, and don't feel pain as much as, say, Yorkshiremen, Lancashire Lads, or even Scotsmen.

The Goat and Barometer is located in Fretful Porcupine, an historic community known to Shakespeare, and not far from Tottering-on-the-Brink, a tiny village where Inspector East had scored a minor triumph recently—but not before the entire population had been exterminated. It was felt by some that this latter circumstance dimmed the luster of his achievement.

A police officer of vast experience, East organized the raid with extreme care. Mironton was tricky—an Apache in his origins—and not the solid English type of crook at all. Given the slightest chance, he would elude almost any net, so weasel-like and cunning was this notorious thief.

Knowing Mironton's reputation, East brought plenty of men, all husky six-footers, stolid, dependable, and in top condition, since they were seldom allowed firearms and had to do their job the hard way. Leaping on large criminals, and dragging them by their collars, often for miles, is admirable exercise, and soon builds a man up. By contrast, in the States, a cop can shoot a dozen crooks without strengthening more than his forefinger.

If Slimy's tip was a good one—and the Inspector had no reason to doubt it since the dwarfish Cockney had never failed him before—this could be a piece of cake. His men had the Goat and Barometer completely surrounded. Mironton's room was on the third floor; he couldn't possibly jump, but if he did, P.C. Harris, fifteen stone, or P.C. Waites, eighteen stone, would have a huge hand on the collar of the jewel thief in seconds. Neither could Mironton get away over the roof, which was well covered by another pair of giant bobbies.

On the other hand, not being English, Mironton might have a gun, and use it, although he was not ordinarily given to violence these days. But few pistols hold more than nine cartridges; so East, after long thought, had brought a dozen men. Even if Mironton shot nine of them, he would have no time to reload before the three survivors, with true British pluck, and in the tradition of the Force, rushed him and overpowered him.

It was a typical spring day in England, the sort to make a vigorous polar bear rejoice. East shivered as he watched Mironton's window. Any moment now the patrons of the

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pub would be quietly ushered out for their own protection, and the raid begun. Yes, here they came now, muttering darkly about their rights as freeborn Englishmen; a few threatened to have a question or two raised in Parliament.

"The Frenchy must be nearly done with his lunch," P.C. Thomas told East, licking his lips.

"We'll cut him off at dessert, then," the Inspector said grimly, and blew a loud blast on his whistle.

They had hoped to take Mironton by surprise, but clearly the thief had noted the gathering of force, and was ready. As East charged up the stairs, there was a shot, and something hummed past his left ear, to strike a stone wall with a thumping noise. Instantly East dropped to the stairs, lying as flat as his bulk would permit.

"Give up, Mironton!" East roared. "You can't get away—the whole building's surrounded. It'll only go harder if you shoot anyone," he added rather plaintively.

In reply came the throaty retort: "Keep away, flic, or I fire!"

The Inspector wriggled down a few steps, and said in a disgusted voice, "Let him cool off for a bit. He'll think better of it—Mironton's no fool; besides, the French can't stick out waiting like us."

Ten minutes later East led another tentative advance, to be met this time by a hail of shots, fired almost hysterically. None of them even came close.

"Cracking up already," the Inspector told his men complacently. "They get excitable under pressure, these foreigners. We'll soon have him."

He was a true prophet, because on the next advance, Mironton, thickset, dark, and heavily mustached, emerged scowling, having first tossed out his empty pistol.

"Lucky you didn't hurt anybody," East told him in a chill voice. "We don't like guns here."

"Ah, bah—*zut, alors!*" the apache snarled. "Your prison will never hold Fanfaron Mironton—*cela va sans dire.*"

Only one thing was wrong with East's triumph—there was no trace of the Indian Diamond. They searched the thief, and then the room—even the remains of his lunch. They verified the fact that no gem had been tossed through the open window to the cobbles below.

Without the Indian Diamond, the case was a bust. East felt sick, seeing the coveted promotion slipping away again. First Inspector North had got it; then West; now South might nose him out too. In every direction disaster loomed.

"Trouble, Inspector?" a voice murmured at his shoulder, and East whirled.

He saw a clean-cut, typically American face, brimming with surplus energy and cheerfulness. The silver eyes were sharp and restless, and the young man's manner was

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brash to the point of arrogance. But there was neither cruelty nor malice there—only the impatience of youth.

"Celery Green!" East exclaimed. "I had no idea you were still in England."

"Oh, I had a few small cases to finish up," the celebrated amateur criminologist said airily. "Nearly every community in England has some crime that's a bit too subtle for the police." He sighed. "Sometimes I wish I didn't have so much talent."

Sturdy and independent, the Inspector hated to ask for help again, particularly from an American, but the situation was desperate, and competition at the Yard was keen; and he felt right now like a very small bowl of gravy surrounded by mounds of dry bread.

"If you've got a few hours," he said diffidently, "this baffling business of the Indian Diamond . . ."

"Why not?" Celery said. "My next case is just a few miles from here, and they're not quite ready for me yet. When they learn that their interpretation of Lady Hooper's dying message is all wrong, I must be available. But I never need more than an hour or two for solving a crime. Of course, Mironton being a French thief, he may be a bit more subtle than your English ones—" He broke off in some embarrassment, not wishing to offend East. "Come on over to the pub, and tell me about it."

Greatly relieved, and having had some experience with the brilliant young American's methods, the Inspector followed Celery Green back to the Goat and Barometer, and summarized the situation.

"It's really quite impossible—a classic locked-room mystery, in fact. It just couldn't be, still it is."

"No diamond on Mironton; no sign of it in the room; not even in the food. Hmm."

The jaunty detective reflected for a moment, then without a word led the way upstairs. There he examined Mironton's room, peered out of the window, which was open wide, and as silently went down, pausing only to scrutinize lead splashes on the stone walls of the inn.

"Beggar blasted away at us," East said.

"Shot pretty high, didn't he?" Green remarked, giving the Inspector a quizzical glance.

"Mironton's no gunman—never heard of his using a gun much. Likes a knife, really. But then he was never trapped like that before, either. Got the wind up—Latin blood, d'ye see."

"Who's in that flat directly across from the inn?"

"Old Colonel Chesterton-Forsythe."

"Big-game hunter?"

"Righto—one of the best in his day."

"Polar explorer, perhaps?" Celery suggested.

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"Oh, then you know about him?"

"Not a bit," Celery said, smiling brightly. "Plausible inferences—my specialty. I saw the mounted game heads from the window." His smooth forehead wrinkled suddenly. "I'm familiar with most species of animals, naturally; but that one big head in the shade—it doesn't seem to fit—"

He broke off as one of East's men hurried up.

"Slimy's on the phone," the constable said. "Seems excited about something."

"Excuse me," the Inspector said to Green. "I asked Slimy to find out what was being whispered about the missing diamond." He strode to the phone, out of the American's hearing. Celery saw him talking into it, and then become quite agitated. When East came back, his face was dark.

"Poor Slimy," he said. "They scragged him—think of that! And just when he was going to tell me about the diamond."

"Did he get a chance to say anything?" Green asked. "I'm quite extraordinary, you know, at dying messages, or rather messages from the dying; one should be precise in this business."

"He did tell me something, or try to," the Inspector said slowly. "But I doubt that the poor chap knew what he was doing. It wasn't like Slimy to show cheek, and with so American a phrase."

Celery Green was quivering with suppressed vitality: a dying man's words invariably had this effect on the young detective.

"What did he say, East. Never assume," he added pedagogically, "that a dying message is irrational; it's just that people in the last throes develop a peculiar fondness for the cryptic. I could tell you about dozens of cases—but never mind, let's have the exact words."

"He said first that he knew where the diamond was, and how clever Mironton had been. Slimy liked to tease a bit sometimes—draw it out, you know. But before he could go on, somebody scuppered the little chap. Then he spoke up again, very feebly, and gasped: 'East, get the lead out.' That was all—he must be dead, but I'm having the call traced, so we'll soon know. Imagine his using that vulgar American phrase!"

"Don't be provincial, East. Suppose we pay a visit to the Colonel," and Celery loped off, with East following him across the street.

"Note the cobblestones, and the thick stone walls of the houses," the young American said. "Mironton had to think fast, and under the circumstances he did a pretty good job."

"I have no idea what you're talking about," the Inspector complained. "I understand the words perfectly, but their sense eludes me. Be a good chap and explain all this palaver about cobblestones and stone walls, will you?"

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"In a few minutes," Celery said crisply. "First we must beard the Colonel in his den."

After the butler admitted them, and Chesterton-Forsythe himself led them into the library under the mistaken impression, gathered from Green's murmured statement, that they were two fellow sportsmen, Celery surveyed the numerous mounted heads. A puzzling shadowed one quickly drew his attention.

"Good Lord, Colonel," he said. "I know about game heads, but this—" His eyes were shining. Surely the white-haired Anglo-Indian wasn't the humorous type. All serious sahib, obviously.

"Harrumph!" the Colonel gargled, giving Green a suspicious stare. "Bit unusual, I know." He patted the huge rump affectionately. "But after all, dash it, this hippo did kill my best gun bearer, Kwaku, and by sitting on the poor fellow. So naturally I mounted the part that did the scragging." He fixed popping blue eyes on the young detective. "As an Ameddican, you wouldn't understand." Then he gave a bellow of fury. "Why, it's been damaged—look at that ruddy hole in it!"

"Ah," Celery said. "Just as I thought." He reached into his pocket, produced a small penknife, opened it dexterously, and delicately pried with its point into the pockmark in the great left cheek of the hippo.

"The Indian Diamond," he said triumphantly.

"But wha-a-?" East gobbled.

"It was quite obvious," Green said debonairly. "Mironton knew that he couldn't escape, much less hang on to the loot. So he thought fast, and then did a lot of wild shooting to set the stage. While you were waiting for him to cool down, he was emptying part of one cartridge, and substituting the diamond. But he had to have a safe, soft target; diamonds are hard, but brittle; he didn't want to powder a fortune against a solid stone wall or on a cobblestone.

"Then he spied the Colonel's open window, the game heads, and this hippo rump. Couldn't hope for an easier, tenderer target. So he fired those wild shots, but he made sure the bullet with the gem went through Chesterton-Forsythe's window. No one can see a bullet's flight, so you didn't suspect what happened. But didn't you wonder why Mironton's window was open? A Frenchman—English spring! Even the natives know better. Except the Colonel, here, a polar explorer, as I deduced. He'd have a window open in April even if there was snow on the ground!"

East was thinking hard; he mustn't look like a complete ass. He had to score at least one point against this self-assured American.

"You've forgotten one thing," he objected. "The lead he removed from the cartridge. It wasn't in the

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room or on the street—we went over every inch of both. You see, I did notice the open window, and thought he might have thrown the diamond out hoping to pick it up from the street later."

"I did not forget." Celery's voice crackled. "Remember Slimy's dying message? He said, 'Get the lead out.' But he wasn't wisecracking, Inspector. He was telling you two things: first, that Mironton had got the lead out of one cartridge and substituted the diamond—"

East could not restrain his impatience. "Yes, I know—you explained that. What I want to know is what happened to the lead he took out of the cartridge."

Celery asked crisply, "What did Mironton eat for lunch?"

East gaped, then said, "Beef, bread, suet pudding—why?"

Celery grinned. "Slimy was also telling you where a chunk of lead might be hidden in an English pub and pass completely undetected. The heaviest, most solid, most indigestible dish known to the civilized world—English suet pudding. The lead is in the pudding."

Colonel Chesterton-Forsythe, who had been listening uncomprehendingly and with wide-eyed resentment, was sputtering into life again. Gingerly he explored the hole in the hippo rump.

"I know you had to find that diamond," he said, "but some things aren't done. This was a kind of cenotaph for poor Kwaku—matter of common decency, and all that. Bad show, Inspector. All right for an Ameddican, but I would never have believed it of an Englishman—prying into a man's private property, into the posterior of a man's own hippo . . ."

East looked at Celery, and the two of them stalked out.

NEXT MONTH . . .

NEW detective *short novel*—complete!

A. H. Z. CARR's *The Nameology Murder*

The July 1965 issue will be on sale June 3, 1965

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CALENDAR OF CRIME

The May story in the CALENDAR OF CRIME *series, to judge from readers' letters and critics' comments through the years, is perhaps the most popular short story Ellery Queen ever wrote. Anthony Boucher has told us that "The Gettysburg Bugle" is one of his favorites (he selected it for inclusion in* THE QUINTESSENCE OF QUEEN), *and it has also been anthologized by Howard Haycraft who once described it as an adventure in which "Ellery Queen and Nikki Porter relive American history and find murder in the quiet Pennsylvania hills." A Memorial Day murder that we hope you will never wholly forget . . .*

THE GETTYSBURG BUGLE

by ELLERY QUEEN

THIS IS A VERY OLD STORY AS Queen stories go. It happened in Ellery's salad days, when he was tossing his talents about like a Sunday chef and a redheaded girl named Nikki Porter had just attached herself to his typewriter. But it has not staled, this story; it has an unwithering flavor which those who partook of it relish to this day.

There are gourmets in America whose taste buds leap at any concoction dated 1861-1865. To such, the mere recitation of ingredients like Bloody Angle, Minié balls, Little Mac, "Tenting Tonight," the brand of Ulyss Grant's whiskey, not to mention Father Abraham, is sufficient to start the passionate flow of juices.

These are the misty-hearted to whom the Civil War is "the War" and the blue-gray armies rather more than men. Romantics, if you will; garnishers of history. But it is they who pace the lonely sentry-post by the night Potomac, they who hear the creaking of the ammunition wagons, the snap of campfires, the scream of the thin gray line and the long groan of the battlefield. They personally flee the burning hell of the Wilderness as the dead rise and twist in the flames; under lanterns, in the flickering mud, they stoop compassionately with the surgeons over quivering heaps. It is they who keep the little flags flying and the ivy ever green on the graves of the old men.

Ellery is of this company, and that is why he regards the case of

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the old men of Jacksburg, Pennsylvania, with particular affection.

Ellery and Nikki came upon the village of Jacksburg as people often come upon the best things, unpropitiously. They had been driving back to New York from Washington, where Ellery had had some sleuthing to do among the stacks of the Library of Congress. Perhaps the Potomac, Arlington's eternal geometry, giant Lincoln frozen in sadness brought their weight to bear upon Ellery's decision to veer toward Gettysburg, where murder had been national. And Nikki had never been there, and May was coming to its end. There was a climate of sentiment.

They crossed the Maryland-Pennsylvania line and spent timeless hours wandering over Culp's Hill and Seminary Ridge and Little Round Top and Spangler's Spring among the watchful monuments. It is a place of everlasting life, where Pickett and Jeb Stuart keep charging to the sight of those with eyes to see, where the blood spills fresh if colorlessly, and the highpitched tones of a tall and ugly man still ring out over the graves.

When they left, Ellery and Nikki were in a mood of wonder, unconscious of time or place, oblivious to the darkening sky and the direction in which the nose of the Duesenberg pointed. So in time they were disagreeably awakened by the alarm clock of nature. The sky had opened on their heads, drenching them to the skin instantly. From the horizon behind them Gettysburg was a battlefield again, sending great flashes of fire through the darkness to the din of celestial cannon.

Ellery stopped the car and put the top up, but the mood was drowned when he discovered that something ultimate had happened to the ignition system. They were marooned in a faraway land, Nikki moaned; making Ellery angry, for it was true.

"We can't go on in these wet clothes, Ellery!"

"Do you suggest that we stay here in them? I'll get this cracker-box started if . . ." But at that moment the watery lights of a house wavered on somewhere ahead, and Ellery became cheerful again.

"At least we'll find out where we are and how far it is to where we ought to be. Who knows? There may even be a garage."

It was a little white house on a little swampy road marked off by a little stone fence covered with rambler rose vines, and the man who opened the door to the dripping wayfarers was little, too, little and weatherskinned and gallused, with eyes that seemed to have roots in the stones and springs of the Pennsylvania countryside. He smiled hospitably, but the smile became concern when he saw how wet they were.

"Won't take no for an answer,"

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he said in a remarkably deep voice, and he chuckled. "That's doctor's orders, though I expect you didn't see my shingle—mostly overgrown with ivy. Got a change of clothing in your car?"

"Oh, yes!" said Nikki abjectly.

Ellery, being a man, hesitated. The house looked neat and clean, there was an enticing fire, and the rain at their backs was coming down with a roar. "Well, thank you . . . but if I might use your phone to call a garage—"

"You just give me the keys to your car trunk."

"But we can't turn your home into a tourist house—"

"It's that, too, when the good Lord sends a wanderer my way. Now see here, this storm's going to keep up most of the night and the roads hereabout get mighty soupy." The little man was bustling into waterproof and overshoes. "I'll get Lew Bagley over at the garage to pick up your car, but for now let's have those keys."

So an hour later, while the elements warred outside, they were toasting safely in a pleasant little parlor, full of Dr. Martin Strong's homemade poppyseed twists, scrapple, and coffee. The doctor, who lived alone, was his own cook. He was also, he said with a chuckle, mayor of the village of Jacksburg and its Chief of Police.

"Lot of us in the village run double harness. Bill Yoder of the hardware store's our undertaker. Lew Bagley's also the fire chief. Ed MacShane—"

"Jacksburger-of-all-trades you may well be, Dr. Strong," said Ellery, "but to me you'll always be primarily the Good Samaritan."

"Hallelujah," said Nikki, piously wiggling her toes.

"And make it Doc," said their host. "Why, it's just selfishness on my part, Mr. Queen. We're off the beaten track here, and you do get a hankering for a new face. I guess I know every dimple and wen on the five hundred and thirty-four in Jacksburg."

"I don't suppose your police chiefship keeps you very busy."

Doc Strong laughed. "Not any. Though last year—" His eyes puckered and he got up to poke the fire. "Did you say, Miss Porter, that Mr. Queen is sort of a detective?"

"Sort of—!" began Nikki. "Why, Dr. Strong, he's solved some simply unbeliev—"

"My father is an Inspector in the New York Police Department," interrupted Ellery, curbing his secretary's enthusiasm with a glance. "I stick my nose into a case once in a while. What about last year, Doc?"

"What put me in mind of it," said Jacksburg's mayor thoughtfully, "was your saying you'd been to Gettysburg today. And also you being interested in crimes . . ." Dr. Strong said abruptly, "I'm a fool, but I'm worried."

"Worried about what?"

"Well . . . Memorial Day's to-

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morrow, and for the first time in my life I'm not looking forward to it. Jacksburg makes quite a fuss about Memorial Day. It's not every village can brag about three living veterans of the Civil War."

"Three?" exclaimed Nikki. "How thrilling."

"Gives you an idea what the Jacksburg doctoring business is like," grinned Doc Strong. "We run to pioneer-type women and longevity . . . I ought to have said we *had* three Civil War veterans—Caleb Atwell, ninety-seven, of the Atwell family, there are dozens of 'em in the county; Zach Bigelow, ninety-five, who lives with his grandson Andy and Andy's wife and seven kids; and Abner Chase, ninety-four, Cissy Chase's great-grandpa. This year we're down to two. Caleb Atwell died last Memorial Day."

"A,B,C," murmured Ellery.

"What's that?"

"I have a bookkeeper's mind, Doc. Atwell, Bigelow, and Chase. Call it a spur-of-the-moment mnemonic system. A died last Memorial Day. Is that why you're not looking forward to this one? B following A sort of thing?"

"Didn't it always?" said Doc Strong with defiance. "Though I'm afraid it ain't—isn't as simple as all that. Maybe I better tell you how Caleb Atwell died.

"Every year Caleb, Zach, and Abner have been the star performers of our Memorial Day exercises, which are held at the old burying ground on the Hookerstown road. The oldest of the three—"

"That would be A. Caleb Atwell."

"That's right. As the oldest, Caleb always blew taps on a cracked old bugle that's 'most as old as he was. Caleb, Zach, and Abner were in the Pennsylvania Seventy-second of Hancock's Second Corps, Brigadier General Alexander S. Webb commanding. They covered themselves with immortal glory—the Seventy-second, I mean—at Gettysburg when they fought back Pickett's charge, and that bugle played a big part in their fighting. Ever since it's been known as the Gettysburg bugle—in Jacksburg, anyway."

The little mayor of Jacksburg looked softly down the years. "It's been a tradition, the oldest living vet tootling that bugle, far back as I remember. I recollect as a boy standing around with my mouth open watching the G.A.R.s—there were lots more then—take turns in front of Maroney Offcutt's General Store . . . been dead thirty-eight years, old Offcutt . . . practicing on the bugle, so any one of 'em would be ready when his turn came."

Doc Strong sighed. "And Zach Bigelow, as the next oldest to Caleb Atwell, he'd be the standard bearer, and Ab Chase, as the next-next-oldest he'd lay the wreath on the me-

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morial monument in the burying ground.

"Well, last Memorial Day, while Zach was holding the regimental colors and Ab the wreath, Caleb blew taps the way he'd done nigh onto twenty times before. All of a sudden, in the middle of a high note, Caleb keeled over. Dropped in his tracks deader than church on Monday."

"Strained himself," said Nikki sympathetically. "But what a poetic way for a Civil War veteran to die."

Doc Strong regarded her oddly. "Maybe," he said. "If you like that kind of poetry." He kicked a log, sending sparks flying up his chimney.

"But surely, Doc," said Ellery with a smile, for he was young in those days, "surely you can't have been suspicious about the death of a man of ninety-seven?"

"Maybe I was," muttered their host. "Maybe I was because it so happened I'd given old Caleb a thorough physical checkup only the day before he died. I'd have staked my medical license he'd live to break a hundred and then some. Healthiest old copperhead I ever knew. Copperhead! I'm blaspheming the dead. Caleb lost an eye on Cemetery Ridge . . . I know—I'm senile. That's what I've been telling myself for the past year."

"Just what did you suspect, Doc?" Ellery forbore to smile now, but only because of Dr. Strong's evident distress.

"Didn't know what to suspect," said the country doctor shortly. "Fooled around with the notion of an autopsy, but the Atwells wouldn't hear of it. Said I was a blame jackass to think a man of ninety-seven would die of anything but old age. I found myself agreeing with 'em. The upshot was we buried Caleb whole."

"But Doc, at that age the human economy can go to pieces without warning—like the one-hoss shay. You must have had another reason for uneasiness. A motive you knew about?"

"Well . . . maybe."

"He was a rich man," said Nikki sagely.

"He didn't have a pot he could call his own," said Doc Strong. "But somebody stood to gain by his death just the same. That is, if the old yarn's true. You see, there's been kind of a legend in Jacksburg about those three old fellows, Mr. Queen. I first heard it when I was running around barefoot with my tail hanging out. Folks said then, and they're still saying it, that back in '65 Caleb and Zach and Ab, who were in the same company, found some sort of treasure."

"Treasure . . ." Nikki began to cough.

"Treasure," repeated Doc Strong doggedly. "Fetched it home to Jacksburg with them, the story goes, hid it, and swore they'd never tell a living soul where it was buried. Now there's lots of tales like

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that came out of the War"—he fixed Nikki with a stern and glittering eye—"and most folks either cough or go into hysterics, but there's something about this one. I've always half believed. So I'm senile on two counts. Just the same, I'll breathe a lot easier when tomorrow's ceremonies are over and Zach Bigelow lays Caleb Atwell's bugle away till next year. As the oldest survivor Zach does the tootling tomorrow."

"They hid the treasure and kept it hidden for considerably over half a century?" Ellery was smiling again. "Doesn't strike me as a very sensible thing to do with a treasure, Doc. It's only sensible if the treasure is imaginary. Then you don't have to produce it."

"The story goes," mumbled Jacksburg's mayor, "that they'd sworn an oath—"

"Not to touch any of it until they all died but one," said Ellery, laughing outright now. "Last-survivor-takes-all department. Doc, that's the way most of these fairy tales go."

Ellery rose, yawning. "I think I hear the featherbed in that other guest room calling. Nikki, your eyeballs are hanging out. Take my advice, Doc, and follow suit. You haven't a thing to worry about but keeping the kids quiet tomorrow while you read the Gettysburg Address!"

As it turned out, the night shared prominently in Doc Martin Strong's Memorial Day responsibilities. Ellery and Nikki awakened to a splendid world, risen from its night's ablutions with a shining eye and a scrubbed look; and they went downstairs within seconds of each other to find the mayor of Jacksburg, galluses dangling on his pants bottom, pottering about the kitchen.

"Morning, morning," said Doc Strong, welcoming but abstracted. "Just fixing things for your breakfast before catching an hour's nap."

"You lamb," said Nikki. "But what a shame, Doctor. Didn't you sleep well last night?"

"Didn't sleep at all. Tossed around a bit and just as I was dropping off my phone rings and it's Cissy Chase. Emergency sick call. Hope it didn't disturb you."

"Cissy Chase." Ellery looked at their host. "Wasn't that the name you mentioned last night of—?"

"Of old Abner Chase's great-granddaughter. That's right, Mr. Queen. Cissy's an orphan and Ab's only kin. She's kept house for the old fellow and taken care of him since she was ten." Doc Strong's shoulders sloped.

Ellery said peculiarly: "It was old Abner . . . ?"

"I was up with Ab all night. This morning, at six thirty, he passed away."

"On Memorial Day!" Nikki's eyes brimmed.

There was a silence, fretted by

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the sizzling of Doc Strong's bacon.

Ellery said at last, "What did Abner Chase die of?"

Doc Strong looked at him. He seemed angry. But then he shook his head. "I'm no Mayo brother, Mr. Queen, and I suppose there's a lot about the practice of medicine I'll never get to learn, but I do know a cerebral hemorrhage when I see one, and that's what Ab Chase died of. In a man of ninety-four, that's as close to natural death as you come . . . No, there wasn't any funny business in this one."

"Except," mumbled Ellery, "that —again—it happened on Memorial Day."

"Man's a contrary animal. Tell him lies and he swallows 'em whole. Give him the truth and he gags on it. Maybe the Almighty gets tired of His thankless job every once in an eon and cuts loose with a little joke." But Doc Strong said it as if he were addressing, not them, but himself. "Any special way you like your eggs?"

"Leave the eggs to me, Doctor," Nikki said firmly. "You go on up those stairs and get some sleep."

"Reckon I better if I'm to do my usual dignified job today," said the mayor of Jacksburg with a sigh. "Though Abner Chase's death is going to make the proceedings solemner than ordinary. Bill Yoder says he's not going to be false to an ancient and honorable profession by doing a hurry-up job undertaking Ab, and maybe that's just as well. If we added the Chase funeral to today's program, even old Abe's immortal words would find it hard to compete. By the way, Mr. Queen, I talked to Lew Bagley this morning and he'll have your car ready in an hour. Special service, seeing you're guests of the mayor." Doc Strong chuckled. "When you planning to leave?"

"I *was* intending . . ." Ellery stopped with a frown. Nikki regarded him with an inquiring look. She had already learned to detect the significance of certain signs peculiar to the Queen physiognomy. "I wonder," murmured Ellery, "how Zach Bigelow's going to take the news."

"He's already taken it, Mr. Queen. Stopped in at Andy Bigelow's place on my way home. Kind of a detour, but I figured I'd better break the news to Zach early as possible."

"Poor thing," said Nikki. "I wonder how it feels to learn you're the only one left." She broke an egg viciously.

"Can't say Zach carried on about it," said Doc Strong dryly. "About all he said, as I recall, was: 'Doggone it, now who's goin' to lay the wreath after I toot the Gettysburg bugle!' I guess when you reach the age of ninety-five, death don't mean what it does to young squirts of sixty-three like me. What time'd you say you were leaving, Mr. Queen?"

"Nikki," muttered Ellery, "are we in any particular hurry?"

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"I don't know. Are we?"

"Besides, it wouldn't be patriotic. Doc, do you suppose Jacksburg would mind if a couple of New York Yankees invited themselves to your Memorial Day exercises?"

The business district of Jacksburg consisted of a single paved street bounded at one end by the sightless eye of a broken traffic signal and at the other by the twin gas pumps in front of Lew Bagley's garage. In between, some stores in need of paint sunned themselves, enjoying the holiday. Red, white, and blue streamers crisscrossed the thoroughfare overhead. A few seedy frame houses, each decorated with an American flag, flanked the main street at both ends.

Ellery and Nikki found the Chase house exactly where Doc Strong had said it would be—just around the corner from Bagley's garage, between the ivy-hidden church and the firehouse of the Jacksburg Volunteer Pump and Hose Company No. 1. But the mayor's directions were a superfluity; it was the only house with a crowded porch.

A heavy-shouldered young girl in a black Sunday dress sat in a rocker, the center of the crowd. Her nose was as red as her big hands, but she was trying to smile at the cheerful words of sympathy winged at her from all sides.

"Thanks, Mis' Plum . . . That's right, Mr. Schmidt, I know . . . But he was such a spry old soul, Emerson, I just can't believe . . ."

"Miss Cissy Chase?"

Had the voice been that of a Confederate spy, a deeper silence could not have drowned the noise. Jacksburg eyes examined Ellery and Nikki with cold curiosity, and feet shuffled.

"My name is Queen and this is Miss Porter. We're attending the Jacksburg Memorial Day exercises as guests of Mayor Strong"—a warming murmur, like a zephyr, passed over the porch—"and he asked us to wait here for him. I'm sorry about your great-grandfather, Miss Chase."

"You must have been very proud of him," said Nikki.

"Thank you, I was. It was so sudden— Won't you set? I mean—do come into the house. Great-grandpa's not here . . . he's over at Bill Yoder's, on some ice . . ."

The girl was flustered and began to cry, and Nikki took her arm and led her into the house. Ellery lingered a moment to exchange appropriate remarks with the neighbors who, while no longer cold, were still curious; and then he followed. It was a dreary little house, with a dark and damp parlor.

"Now, now, this is no time for fussing—may I call you Cissy?" Nikki was saying soothingly. "Besides, you're better off away from all those folks. Why, Ellery, she's only a child!"

And a very plain child, Ellery

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thought, with a pinched face and empty eyes; and he almost wished he had driven past the broken traffic light and turned north.

"I understand the parade to the burying ground is going to form outside your house, Cissy," he said. "By the way, have Andrew Bigelow and his grandfather Zach arrived yet?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Cissy Chase dully. "It's all such a dream, seems like."

"Of course. And you're left alone. Haven't you any family at all, Cissy?"

"No."

"Isn't there some young man—?"

Cissy shook her head bitterly. "Who'd marry me? This is the only decent dress I got, and it's four years old. We lived on Great-grandpa's pension and what I could earn hiring out by the day. Which ain't much, nor often. Now . . ."

"I'm sure you'll find something to do," said Nikki, very heartily.

"In Jacksburg?"

Nikki was silent.

"Cissy." Ellery spoke casually, and she did not even look up. "Doc Strong mentioned something about a treasure. Do you know anything about it?"

"Oh, that." Cissy shrugged. "Just what Great-grandpa told me, and he hardly ever told the same story twice. But near as I was ever able to make out, one time during the War him and Caleb Atwell and Zach Bigelow got separated from the army—scouting, or foraging, or something. It was down South somewhere, and they spent the night in an old empty mansion that was half burned down.

"Next morning they went through the ruins to see what they could pick up, and buried in the cellar they found the treasure. A big fortune in money, Great-grandpa said. They were afraid to take it with them, so they buried it in the same place in the cellar and made a map of the location and after the War they went back, the three of 'em, and dug it up again. Then they made the pact."

"Oh, yes," said Ellery. "The pact."

"Swore they'd hold onto the treasure till only one of them remained alive, I don't know why, then the last one was to get it all. Leastways, that's how Great-grandpa told it. That part he always told the same."

"Did he ever say how much of a fortune it was?"

Cissy laughed. "Couple of hundred thousand dollars. I ain't saying Great-grandpa was cracked, but you know how an old man gets."

"Did he ever give you a hint as to where he and Caleb and Zach hid the money after they got it back North?"

"No, he'd just slap his knee and wink at me."

"Maybe," said Ellery suddenly,

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"maybe there's something to that yarn after all."

Nikki stared. "But Ellery, you said—! Cissy, did you hear that?"

But Cissy only drooped. "If there is, it's all Zach Bigelow's now."

Then Doc Strong came in, fresh as a daisy in a pressed blue suit and a stiff collar and a bow tie, and a great many other people came in, too. Ellery and Nikki surrendered Cissy Chase to Jacksburg.

"If there's anything to the story," Nikki whispered to Ellery, "and if Mayor Strong is right, then that old scoundrel Bigelow's been murdering his friends to get the money!"

"After all these years, Nikki? At the age of ninety-five?" Ellery shook his head.

"But then what—?"

"I don't know." But when the little mayor happened to look their way, Ellery caught his eye and took him aside and whispered in his ear.

The procession—near every car in Jacksburg, Doc Strong announced proudly—got under way at exactly two o'clock.

Nikki had been embarrassed but not surprised to find herself being handed into the leading car, an old but brightly polished touring job contributed for the occasion by Lew Bagley; for the moment Nikki spied the ancient, doddering head under the Union Army hat in the front seat she detected the fine Italian whisper of her employer. Zach Bigelow held his papery frame fiercely if shakily erect between the driver and a powerful red-necked man who, Nikki surmised, was the old man's grandson, Andy Bigelow.

Nikki looked back, peering around the flapping folds of the flag stuck in the corner of the car. Cissy Chase was in the second car in a black veil, weeping on a stout woman's shoulder. So the female Yankee from New York sat back between Ellery and Mayor Strong, against the bank of flowers in which the flag was set, and glared at the necks of the two Bigelows, having long since taken sides in this matter. And when Doc Strong made the introductions, Nikki barely nodded to Jacksburg's sole survivor of the Grand Army of the Republic, and then only in acknowledgment of his historic importance.

Ellery, however, was all deference and cordiality, even to the brutal-faced grandson. He leaned forward, talking into the hairy ear.

"How do I address your grandfather, Mr. Bigelow? I don't want to make a mistake about his rank."

"Gramp's a general," said Andy Bigelow loudly. "Ain't you, Gramp?" He beamed at the ancient, but Zach Bigelow was staring proudly ahead, holding fast to something in a rotted musette bag on his lap. "Went through the War a private," the grandson confided, "but he don't like to talk about that."

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"General Bigelow—" began Ellery.

"That's his deef ear," said the grandson. "Try the other one."

"General Bigelow!"

"Hey?" The old man turned his trembling head, glaring. "Speak up, bub. Ye're mumblin'."

"General Bigelow," shouted Ellery, "now that all the money is yours, what are you going to do with it?"

"Hey? Money?"

"The treasure, Gramp," roared Andy Bigelow. "They've even heard about it in New York. What are you goin' to do with it, he wants to know?"

"Does, does he?" Old Zach sounded grimly amused. "Can't talk, Andy. Hurts m' neck."

"How much does it amount to, General?" Ellery yelled.

Old Zach eyed him. "Mighty nosy, ain't ye?" Then he cackled. "Last time we counted it—Caleb, Ab, and me—came to nigh on a million dollars. Yes, sir, one million dollars." The old man's left eye, startlingly, drooped. "Goin' to be a big surprise to the smart-alecks and the doubtin' Thomases. You wait an' see."

Andy Bigelow grinned, and Nikki could have strangled him.

"According to Cissy," Nikki murmured to Doc Strong, "Abner Chase said it was only two hundred thousand."

"Zach makes it more every time he talks about it," said the mayor unhappily.

"I heard ye, Martin Strong!" yelled Zach Bigelow, swiveling his twig of a neck so suddenly that Nikki winced, expecting it to snap. "You wait! I'll show ye, ye durn whippersnapper, who's a lot o' wind!"

"Now, Zach," said Doc Strong pacifyingly. "Save your wind for that bugle."

Zach Bigelow cackled and clutched the musette bag in his lap, glaring ahead in triumph, as if he had scored a great victory.

Ellery said no more. Oddly, he kept staring not at old Zach but at Andy Bigelow, who sat beside his grandfather grinning at invisible audiences along the empty countryside as if he, too, had won—or was on his way to winning—a triumph.

The sun was hot. Men shucked their coats and women fanned themselves with handkerchiefs and pocketbooks.

"It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated . . ."

Children dodged among the graves, pursued by shushing mothers. On most of the graves there were fresh flowers.

"—that from these honored dead . . ."

Little American flags protruded from the graves, too.

". . . gave the last full measure of devotion . . ."

Doc Martin Strong's voice was

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deep and sure, not at all like the voice of that tall ugly man, who had spoken the same words apologetically.

". . . that these dead shall not have died in vain . . ."

Doc was standing on the pedestal of the Civil War Monument, which was decorated with flags and bunting and faced the weathered stone ranks like a commander in full-dress uniform.

"—that this nation, under God . . ."

A color guard of the American Legion, Jacksburg Post, stood at attention between the mayor and the people. A file of Legionnaires carrying old Sharps rifles faced the graves.

"—and that government of the people . . ."

Beside the mayor, disdaining the simian shoulder of his grandson, stood General Zach Bigelow. Straight as the barrel of a Sharps, musette bag held tightly to his blue tunic.

". . . shall not perish from the earth."

The old man nodded impatiently. He began to fumble with the bag.

"Comp-'ny! Present—arms!"

"Go ahead, Gramp!" Andy Bigelow bellowed.

The old man muttered. He was having difficulty extricating the bugle from the bag.

"Here, lemme give ye a hand!"

"Let the old man alone, Andy," said the mayor of Jacksburg quietly. "We're in no hurry."

Finally the bugle was free. It was an old army bugle, as old as Zach Bigelow, dented and scarred in a hundred places.

The old man raised it to his earth-colored lips.

Now his hands were not shaking.

Now even the children were quiet.

Now the Legionnaires stood more rigidly.

And the old man began to play taps.

It could hardly have been called playing. He blew, and out of the bugle's bell came cracked sounds. And sometimes he blew and no sounds came out at all. Then the veins of his neck swelled and his face turned to burning bark. Or he sucked at the mouthpiece, in and out, to clear it of his spittle. But still he blew, and the trees in the burying ground nodded in the warm breeze, and the people stood at attention listening as if the butchery of sound were sweet music.

And then, suddenly, the butchery faltered. Old Zach Bigelow stood with bulging eyes. The Gettysburg bugle fell to the pedestal with a tinny clatter.

For an instant everything seemed to stop—the slight movements of the children, the breathing of the people, even the rustling of the leaves.

Then into the vacuum rushed a murmur of horror, and Nikki unbelievingly opened the eyes which

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she had shut to glimpse the last of Jacksburg's G.A.R. veterans crumpling to the feet of Doc Strong and Andy Bigelow.

"You were right the first time, Doc," Ellery said.

They were in Andy Bigelow's house, where old Zach's body had been taken from the cemetery. The house was full of chittering women and scampering children, but in this room there were only a few, and they talked in low tones. The old man was laid out on a settee with a patchwork quilt over him. Doc Strong sat in a rocker beside the body, looking very old.

"It's my fault," he mumbled. "I didn't examine Caleb's mouth last year. I didn't examine the mouthpiece of that bugle. It's my fault, Mr. Queen."

Ellery soothed him. "It's not an easy poison to spot, Doc, as you know. And after all, the whole thing was so ludicrous. You'd have caught it in autopsy, but the Atwells laughed you out of it."

"They're all gone. All three." Doc Strong looked up fiercely. "Who poisoned their bugle?"

"God Almighty, don't look at me," said Andy Bigelow. "Anybody could of, Doc."

"Anybody, Andy?" the mayor cried. "When Caleb Atwell died, Zach took the bugle and it's been in this house for a year!"

"Anybody could of," said Bigelow stubbornly. "The bugle was hangin' over the fireplace and anybody could of snuck in durin' the night . . . Anyway, it wasn't here before old Caleb died; *he* had it up to last Memorial Day. Who poisoned it in *his* house?"

"We won't get anywhere on this tack, Doc," Ellery murmured. "Bigelow. Did your grandfather ever let on where that Civil War treasure is hidden?"

"Suppose he did." The man locked his lips, blinking, as if he had been surprised into the half-admission. "What's it to you?"

"That money is behind the murders, Bigelow."

"Don't know nothin' about that. Anyway, nobody's got no right to that money but me." Andy Bigelow spread his thick chest. "When Ab Chase died, Gramp was the last survivor. That money was Zach Bigelow's. I'm his next o' kin, so now it's mine!"

"You know where it's hid, Andy." Doc was on his feet, eyes glittering. "Where?"

"I ain't talkin'. Git outen my house!"

"I'm the law in Jacksburg, too, Andy," Doc said softly. "This is a murder case. Where's that money?"

Bigelow laughed.

"You didn't know, Bigelow, did you?" said Ellery.

"Course not." He laughed again. "See, Doc? He's on your side, and he says I don't know, too."

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"That is," said Ellery, "until a few minutes ago."

Bigelow's grin faded. "What are ye talkin' about?"

"Zach Bigelow wrote a message this morning, immediately after Doc Strong told him about Abner Chase's death."

Bigelow's face went ashen.

"And your grandfather sealed the message in an envelope—"

"Who told ye that?" yelled Bigelow.

"One of your children. And the first thing you did when we got home from the burying ground with your grandfather's corpse was to sneak up to the old man's bedroom. Hand it over."

Bigelow made two fists. Then he laughed again. "All right, I'll let ye see it. Hell, I'll let ye dig the money up for me! Why not? It's mine by law. Here, read it. See? He wrote my name on the envelope!"

And so he had. And the message in the envelope was also written in ink, in the same wavering hand:

> Dere Andy now that Ab Chase is ded to—if sumthin happins to me you wil find the money we been keepin all these long yeres in a iron box in the coffin *wich we beried Caleb Atwell in*. I leave it all to you my beluved grandson cuz you been sech a good grandson to me. Yours truly Zach Bigelow.

"In Caleb's coffin," choked Doc Strong.

Ellery's face was impassive. "How soon can you get an exhumation order, Doc?"

"Right now," exclaimed Doc. "I'm also deputy coroner of this district!"

And they took some men and they went back to the old burying ground, and in the darkening day they dug up the remains of Caleb Atwell and they opened the casket and found, on the corpse's knees, a flattish box of iron with a hasp but no lock.

And, while two strong men held Andy Bigelow to keep him from hurling himself at the crumbling coffin, Doctor-Mayor-Chief of Police-Deputy Coroner Martin Strong held his breath and raised the lid of the iron box.

And it was crammed to the brim with moldy bills of large denominations.

In Confederate money.

No one said anything for some time, not even Andy Bigelow.

Then Ellery said, "It stood to reason. They found it buried in the cellar of an old Southern mansion—would it be Northern greenbacks? When they dug it up again after the War and brought it up to Jacksburg they probably had some faint hope that it might have some value. When they realized it was worthless, they decided to have some fun with it. This has been a private joke of those three old rascals since, roughly, 1865.

"When Caleb died last Memorial

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Day, Abner and Zach probably decided that, as the first of the trio to go, Caleb ought to have the honor of being custodian of their Confederate treasure in perpetuity. So one of them managed to slip the iron box into the coffin before the lid was screwed on. Zach's note bequeathing his 'fortune' to his 'beloved grandson'—in view of what I've seen of his beloved grandson today—was the old fellow's final joke."

Everybody chuckled; but the corpse stared mirthlessly and the silence fell again, to be broken by a weak curse from Andy Bigelow and Doc Strong's puzzled: "But Mr. Queen, that doesn't explain the murders."

"Well, now, Doc, it does," said Ellery; and then he said in a very different tone: "Suppose we put old Caleb back the way we found him, for your re-exhumation later for autopsy, Doc—and then we'll close the book on your Memorial Day murders."

Ellery closed the book in town, in the dusk, on the porch of Cissy Chase's house, which was central and convenient for everybody. Ellery and Nikki and Doc Strong and Cissy and Andy Bigelow—still clutching the iron box dazedly—were on the porch, and Lew Bagley and Bill Yoder and everyone else in Jacksburg, it seemed, stood about on the lawn and sidewalk, listening. And there was a touch of sadness to the soft twilight air, for something vital and exciting in the life of the village had come to an end.

"There's no trick to this," began Ellery, "and no joke, either, even though the men who were murdered were so old that death had grown tired waiting for them. The answer is as simple as the initials of their last names.

"Who knew that the supposed fortune was in Confederate money and therefore worthless? Only the three old men. One or another of the three would hardly have planned the deaths of the other two for possession of some scraps of valueless paper. So the murderer has to be someone who believed the fortune was legitimate and who—since until today there was no clue to the money's hiding place—knew he could claim it legally.

"Now of course that last-survivor-take-all business was pure moonshine, invented by Caleb, Zach, and Abner for their own amusement and the mystification of the community. But the would-be murderer didn't know that. The would-be murderer went on the assumption that the *whole* story was true, or he wouldn't have planned murder in the first place.

"Who would be able to claim the fortune legally if the last of the three old men—the survivor who presumably came into possession

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of the fortune on the deaths of the other two—died in his turn?"

"Last survivor's heir," said Doc Strong, and he rose.

"And who is the last survivor's heir?"

"Zach Bigelow's grandson, Andy." And the little mayor of Jacksburg stared hard at Bigelow, and a grumbling sound came from the people below, and Bigelow shrank against the wall behind Cissy, as if to seek her protection. But Cissy only looked at him and moved away.

"You thought the fortune was real," Cissy said scornfully, "so you killed Caleb Atwell and my great-grandpa so your grandfather'd be the last survivor and so you could kill him the way you did today and get the fortune."

"That's it, Ellery," cried Nikki.

"Unfortunately, Nikki, that's not it at all. You all refer to Zach Bigelow as the last survivor—"

"Well, he was," said Nikki in amazement.

"How could he not be?" said Doc Strong. "Caleb and Abner died first—"

"Literally, that's true," said Ellery, "but what you've all forgotten is that Zach Bigelow was the last survivor *only by accident.* When Abner Chase died early this morning, was it through poisoning, or some other violent means? No, Doc, you were absolutely positive he'd died of a cerebral hemorrhage —not by violence, but a natural death.

"Don't you see that if Abner Chase hadn't died a natural death early this morning, *he'd still be alive this evening?* Zach Bigelow would have put the bugle to his lips this afternoon, just as he did, just as Caleb Atwell did a year ago *. . . and at this moment Abner Chase would have been the last survivor.*

"And who was Abner Chase's only living heir, the girl who would have fallen heir to Abner's fortune when, in time, or through her assistance, he joined his cronies in the great bivouac on the other side?

"You lied to me, Cissy," said Ellery to the shrinking girl in his grip, as a horror very like the horror of the burying ground in the afternoon came over the crowd of mesmerized Jacksburgers. "You pretended you didn't believe the story of the fortune. But that was only after your great-grandfather had inconsiderately died of a stroke just a few hours before old Zach would have died of poisoning, and you couldn't inherit that great, great fortune, anyway!"

Nikki did not speak until they were twenty-five miles from Jacksburg. Then all she said was, "And now there's nobody left to blow the Gettysburg bugle," and she continued to stare into the darkness toward the south.

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The first of what we hope will become a new detective series, and told in what can only be called "Variety-ese"—part English, part American, and part jargon, lingo, vernac., cant, argot—in a word, a slanguage all of its own. Yes, let's have more of Uncle Pinkerton, Indiana small-town sleuth, and his new-variation "Watson"—welcome, Unc and Woody!

UNC SOLVES FLIX FLAP

by JOHN JAKES

SHOWBIZ COGNOSCENTI READING *GALORE, The Newspaper of Amusement,* know our weekly tab of jaunting celebs, with headings "LA-NY" and "NY-LA" and "Eur-NY." Same cognoscenti, however, might register beaucoup astonishment on learning that one *GALORE* reporter travels "NY-Weevers, Ind." Namely, me. Purpose is to visit my only relatives, who raised me after my folks passed on. Except for this annual trip, I pretty well disguise all stix upbringing.

To reach Weevers down in the hills just north of the O. River, first it's a jet, then it's a feeder airline, then it's a bus if it isn't back in the repair shop. I pulled in early one hot Fri. A.M. and, as per custom, got lamped hard while ankling out Elm Street. Weevers folks are okay, but have never heard of slightly tapered slax, no pleats. Wearing same rouses suspicion.

"Hello?" I knocked on the kitchen door of the familiar big, old white house. "Anybody home?"

Aunt Ellen popped up just behind some chocolate pie aromas. She adjusted specs and her gray bun, broke out in gasps, smiled.

"Woodrow! We weren't expecting you till August."

"Hi, Aunt Ellen." We bussed. "The ed re-skedded everybody's vacation just Tuesday. Where's Unc?"

Aunt E. frowned. "Woodrow, there's trouble. Sheriff Gumley—you know your Uncle Pinkerton and Gus Gumley are great checker cronies—picked him up just as he was leaving for the store. A deputy was hit on the head last night, out at The Star-Lite. The man's in County Hospital and nobody knows who did it, either."

"Hmmm, The Star-Lite. Saw it from the bus. Ozoner, right?"

"Woodrow, you know your entertainment jargon just floors me."

"Drive-in movie," I explained. "There's some kind of mystery going on?"

"Yes. Some leading Weevers citizens objected to the drive-in manager, Mr. Norris, showing triple

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feature horror movies. Then Deputy Booth got attacked. You remember how Sheriff Gus Gumley is. Whenever there's a mystery—"

"—he beelines to Unc." I nodded.

This re-confirmed feelings that my Uncle Pinkerton should have ankled out of Weevers long ago, as he is one of few locals with real pizaaz. However, he is a Weevers native and very high in the hardware biz.

The meller bit at The Star-Lite hinted of some *GALORE* copy. "Maybe I should go out there. I see Unc's wheels in the drive. Oke if I use them?"

Aunt E. said, "Woodrow, I had hoped you wouldn't still be working for that—" her lips thinned "—that sinful entertainment sheet."

"Now Aunt Ellen, the people I cover are just like folks in Weevers, except that they thesp in flix or juggle Indian clubs." I patted her arm. "Don't worry, I'm a good boy."

Before I exited, however, she insisted I eat some of the chocolate pie she was baking, also a glass of milk. "Woodrow Ennis, you look peaked. Can't you ever get a glass of milk in those dingy dens of iniquity where you get material for your stories?"

"Well, I guess I *could,* but on the club circuit if you asked for milk they would kind of look at you funny."

But as the pampering is half the fun of my annual jaunt, I had two slices of pie and an extra glass of the cow extract. Aunt E. chattered: wishing I'd brought some rain along as it was a dry spell in Weevers; how long was I planning to stay; etc., etc.

"Boffo pie," I said when finished.

"Oh, stop that lingo." But she hugged me. I hopped in Unc's old straight-stick Chev coupe outside.

The Star-Lite was about a 150-car ozoner. Marquee ballyhooed three flix: *Bikini Blood Bath, The Fang Club,* and *The Peeper Strikes,* two of which I had had the misfortune to review under my byline of Woody.

A sheriff's officer stood beside the b.o. kiosk which displayed a *CLOSED TEMPORARILY* sign. Mentioning I was Unc's nephew enabled me to ankle inside.

Another County Sheriff's car was parked beside the concrete-block combo concession stand, projection booth, and office. Same was located in lot's center, atop usual incline. Front had projection slots between double screen doors leading to concession.

Inside, place was a mess. Floor littered with popcorn, which was also sprinkled profusely in the gray gravel outside. One glass side of the popcorner was in absentia. I heard voices.

Around back, I knocked on the office door, walked in.

"—yes, Pinky," this vaguely familiar fatty in Sam Browne was saying, "Deputy Horace Booth will recover fine. But he's dad-blamed

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if he saw who smacked him, and—what do you want, kid?"

Unc turned. "Woodrow! For heaven's sake!"

I pumped Unc's hand, explaining the early vacation bit. "How you been, Unc?"

"First-rate. My, it's grand to see you again."

Sheriff Gumley frowned. "Know this sharpie, Pinky?"

"Sure, Gus. This is Woodrow Ennis, my sister Nella's boy."

"This is skinny little Woodrow Ennis who used to run down Main Street with a yo-yo?" Gumley shook his head glumly.

"Unc, I hear there's a mystery afoot," I said. "Up to your old tricks, eh. Any *GALORE* copy in it?"

"Possibly." To Gumley: "Woodrow works in New York and writes for a weekly entertainment newspaper. That explains his vocabulary."

Then Unc pointed to a brown stain on the linoleum in one corner, beside an old roll-front desk heaped with distrib bulletins, promo handouts, mats, other apparati of the ozoner trade. Unc said same bloodstain possibly connected with current Weevers flicker flap. He'd caught present bill Tues.

"I must admit I didn't find the movies bad so much as sad. I could take sharper pictures with my old box Brownie. Anyway, some citizens charge that these movies, which are filled with stranglings, eye-gougings, knifings, beatings, throttlings, shootings, blood-lettings, and other sophisticated refinements of civilization, exert an unwholesome influence on our youngsters."

"I wouldn't know about that, Unc. But I've seen two of them. You're right, quality-wise. Quick-and-dirty indie jobs."

"People asked us to do something," said Gumley.

"And current head of the committee," said Unc, "is Roscoe P. Wentworth."

I jotted fast. "I remember him. Grocery biz?"

"Yes, Woodrow."

Unc gave me a quick treatment: Roscoe P. Wentworth formerly owned Bee Grocery, Main Street. Retired at 68. Now 70, spending all his time on front porch of his new house, feet up on porch rail, thinking about other people's problems, viz., type of flix being shown by new Star-Lite manager, one Pete Norris.

Norris was not ozoner owner. Loot for buying theatre raised by combine in Louisv. or Cincy, membership unknown. Norris took over mgmt., began importing lots of scare movies. Biz did a mighty double, then triple. Norris also admitted anybody irregardless of age. People handed petition to Gumley, charging flix too horrific. Then Roscoe P. Wentworth got into act.

"Roscoe," said Unc, "who is my brother in the Masons though I

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confess I've never liked him much, sort of took over as leader of the crusade. His personal opposition seemed to swell the gate even more."

I sighed. "Typical. The more they howl, the more the junk rakes in."

"My sentiments exactly."

A flash: "*Stix crix nix pix!*"

Sheriff Gumley ogled. "Are you talking some foreign language, son?"

Unc grinned. "No, Gus. I get freebs—I mean, complimentary copies of *GALORE*. Woodrow was simply writing one of their headlines. The translation is, rural critics turn thumbs down on movies."

Unc then said brown spot on the linoleum was blood from Deputy Horace Booth's head. Turned out that Gumley had sent his deputy to the ozoner preceding night to watch flix, give Gumley a personal report. Deputy not in uniform. Per suggestion from Sheriff, deputy to stop in after show, see whether Norris would change bill until things were thrashed out. Triple bill wrapped up in vicinity of 2 A.M.

Deputy's was one of few cars left. He drove up to office from back row. Lights on inside. Also saw another car parked at bldg.'s front. Couldn't see plate number. Got out, started for office—*whap!* Hit over head by somebody in dark.

"A cleaning man found him unconscious inside at seven this morning," Unc went on. "Whoever hit him moved him in later. And Norris has disappeared. Skedaddled out of his little bachelor apartment in town. Gus has alarms out. But that doesn't explain why Norris would hit a Deputy Sheriff who was merely coming to talk."

"Say," I said, "was that mess around the concession stand part of the donnybrook?"

Gumley said no. Happened earlier last P.M. Rowdies from nearby Harperville got smart with concession girl. Mucho fists, machine busted, popcorn all over the premises. Deputy Booth no help. Parked way back, he doubtless thought it was just a crowd milling. Norris and projectionists ran rowdies off. Gumley figured no connection with cop-bopping.

"But Pinky—" the poor local displayed beaucoup bafflement "—I swan if I can figure anything else to explain why somebody hit Horace."

Unc said thoughtfully, "Well, Gus, it plainly wasn't robbery. Every cent of box office receipts, as noted in the ledger and verified in the cash box you impounded, was still there. And there aren't any jimmy marks on the safe. Now, one of the rowdies might have come back later and mistaken Deputy Booth for Norris. It's an outside chance, but it just doesn't satisfy me, somehow."

New Haven-type gloom descended: poor tryout notices spell turkey.

The Sheriff decided to wheel over and tell Roscoe P. Wentworth

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he was shuttering The Star-Lite temporarily. Apparently this Wentworth was already rumoring that Gumley had deliberately let Norris get away.

As we left, Unc told me more about R.P.W.'s busybodying, most recent example being harassment of young female biology teacher at high school the preceding year. Chick left town with nerves shattered.

Unc noticed his own wheels present. "Why don't you follow us, Woodrow? I ought to ride with Gus and cheer him up. I think he's counting on me for some sensational theories."

"But it's Dudsville so far, right?" I said, stuffing my notebook away.

Unc winced. "This is Weevers, Woodrow, not Broadway. Please try to respect the locals and speak American—at least once in a while."

His grin said he was fooling. But I could see he was upset. Around Weevers, Unc has an egghead rep, viz., he reads *Time*.

I bounced the Chev along behind the prowler, my nerves slightly grated by the hix tunes from Tin Pan Valley they play on Radio Station WEEV. I'm strictly a symph man, myself.

The Sheriff pulled into the long drive of one of the biggest pads in town, located on Maple. As I recalled, joint once belonged to Mush Snellins, Prop. of Snellins Your Friendly Used Car Dealer.

Roscoe P. Wentworth's two vehicles were in the drive. One was an old coupe, about the vintage of Unc's, the typical farmer's car visible at every parking slot on Main of a Sat. A.M. Other was a late-model Cad convertible, chicken-yellow.

"—going to close it for a time, Roscoe," Sheriff Gumley was saying as I ascended the porch for my first gander in years at Roscoe P. Wentworth. Gumley was positively terping, he was so nervous. But I could see how Wentworth might terrorize the locals. He looked like he had *chutzpah*.

He was a mummified old party with white hair, sunken cheeks, and no flesh on his bones. He wore linen slax that went out with Coolidge, a rib-weave shirt. He sat in his porch swing and glared and swung, not traveling very far since his ripple-soled shoes were planted up on the railing like he was a little king. Across his knees rested a thick, knobby walking stick. His head bobbed as Gumley continued.

"—thought you'd be glad to hear that I've issued a three-state alarm for Pete Norris, too."

Pregnant pause. I decided that in addition to busybodying, R.P.W. was also a showoff-status nut. Part of the house siding was being painted—drop cloths, buckets, etc.; looked like a white smudge of paint on R.P.W.'s chin. Extensive lawn program under way—two piles of fill dirt heaped in yard; looked like

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a little round black gob of it stuck in one sole ripple. New chrome-type grille on porch and other fancy fixin's.

At last the oracle spaketh: "About time you did something, Gumley. Pinkerton, what's your part in this?"

"Oh," said Unc, staring at a bee tulip-hopping, "I'm just taking the air with Gus."

Unc wandered down off the porch. As he bent to touch a tulip, Wentworth fidgeted. He shuddered with relief when Unc stopped fingering.

Staring past Wentworth's brogans, Unc said, "Certainly a lot of new things around here, Roscoe. Lawn work, brand-new grille, fresh paint—even a new car. Am I correct?"

"Yes, 'tis. Paid cash for everything, too. I don't abide these credit plans like you give at your hardware store. They're weakening to the moral fiber."

"Just hadn't seen it all before, is all," murmured Unc.

"Say," said R.P.W., "who's this scalawag standing around? From the cut of his clothes he's not from around these parts. Are you selling magazines, sonny?"

"This," said Unc sort of sharply, "is my nephew Woodrow Ennis. Don't you remember him?"

"Woodrow Ennis! Why, he was a nice-looking little boy. This young fellow looks all pasty-faced and debauched. Probably been seeing too many of those murder-horror movies which corrupt our youth. I swear, Gumley, if you don't get some action, and fast—"

Unc interrupted kind of softly. "Are you really sure you want Gus to get some action, Roscoe?"

The swing squeak stopped. "Course I do! All decent citizens feel the way—"

"I wonder whether you're as decent as you pretend, Roscoe."

"What? Pinkerton, I'll get a lawyer if you dare cast any—"

"Shame on you, Roscoe!" Unc said, showing red in his cheek region. "Setting out to save everybody else when you ought to be saving yourself."

Gumley looked ossified. "What in hell fire's got into you, Pinky?"

"Keep going, Unc," I said. "It's oke material."

Unc hitched up the belt of his wash pants. "Now Gus, we here in Weevers know a lot about everybody's affairs, including the Bee Grocery that Roscoe used to own. I hate to say it, Roscoe, but you always lost money on that store. And here you are, in a house six times bigger than your old one, buying a lot of expensive things for which you admit yourself you paid cash."

"My financial affairs, Pinkerton, are none of your—"

"'Course not," Unc interrupted again, his smile gone now, "Not unless they include a secret investment in a local property which is currently causing commotion—the

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only local property which has really boomed lately. Namely, The Star-Lite."

"Pinky, you're crazy," Gumley said. "Some combine in Louisville owns it."

"But how do we know Roscoe didn't put some cash into that combine as a silent partner? We can check it. Folks invest in all sorts of things these days. If the combine hired Norris, and Norris imported some movies of a type not seen around Weevers before, the investors would get rich pretty fast."

Gumley was mucho perturbed. "That's dangerous ground, Pinky."

"Grounds for a lawsuit!" squealed Wentworth, waving his walking stick. "A lawsuit, and don't think I'm foolin'!"

"Maybe," said Unc. "But it just came over me. Roscoe was pretty quiet when the citizens first got stirred up. Then all of a sudden he developed into a very pious person and became leader of the crusade. Because he didn't like that type picture? I wonder. Maybe it was because it dawned on him that he'd better cover himself. Maybe it also dawned on him that the surest way to make money with shoddy goods is to start people yelling they shouldn't be sold."

"Pinkerton, I am going to personally sue you for all—"

"Oh, be quiet, Roscoe! Gus, there was no robbery. So why would anybody attack Deputy Booth? Let's say the guilty person drove to The Star-Lite last night to have a little meeting with Norris over the pleasant profit situation. Not in a fancy car, but in an old car like the kind you see every day around Weevers. A car like the one parked in front of that Caddy there. He'd have arrived while the last feature was running because, around one A.M. or one thirty, he could have just driven up and unhooked the gate chain. The cashier and attendants would have been gone, after opening up the exit lane.

"So suppose the guilty person sneaked into the office without being seen by any of the people still watching the show. They were probably smooching anyway. The show ends. The guilty party and Norris discuss things. A car pulls up. The guilty party darts outside to see who it is. What's the one thing that might get him excited?" Unc spread his hands. "That the man walking toward the office is from Weevers, too—*and would recognize him.*"

"A lie!" Wentworth croaked. "A dirty, misbegotten—"

"Oh, come on," Unc remonstrated. "The one thing that would make a man like you lose his head and bash Deputy Booth—the one thing a man like you can't stand, Roscoe—is public exposure. I think it was you who hit the Deputy over the head. You're not very big for a man going on seventy-one. But that stick sure is."

Sheriff Gumley looked like he

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was skedded for a coronary. "Pinky, you've got sunstroke! This is the wildest, craziest bunch of circumstantial evidence—"

"Is it, Gus?" Unc cocked an eyebrow. "I think Roscoe wanted Pete Norris out of town after he bashed Booth because Roscoe was afraid Pete might protect himself by telling about the silent partnership. I'll bet Roscoe threatened Norris with arrest, and with his position in town who'd believe a Johnny-come-lately like Norris against the word of a Roscoe P. Wentworth? Why, I can see it clear as rain water. A gleeful little celebration turns into a hollering session. At least they had the consideration to drag Horace inside so he wouldn't catch pneumonia from the damp."

R.P.W. now had *Guilty* written all over his map. But he was still game.

"A lie, a lie! There's not a bit of evidence to support—"

All of a sudden Unc snatched at the sole of Wentworth's left brogan. Wentworth paled, tried to pull his feet down off the rail. Unc rolled the little round black something in his palm.

"You seem to have something stuck in your ripple sole, Roscoe. I noticed it when I was down there admiring the tulips. Till then, I didn't have any idea about all this. Gus, would you care for a piece of popcorn from the ground outside The Star-Lite concession stand?"

"Popcorn!" I said. "Unc, popcorn is white."

"Not necessarily, Woodrow. Before it's popped, it's yellow. And after it's popped, ninety-five percent or so turns white, but there are always some kernels that never pop and burn black. You ought to know that—remember how we used to make popcorn many an evening?"

Talk about feeling like a resident of Hixville! I mumbled, "I saw that thing, but I thought it was a gob from one of those piles of fill dirt."

"Might have been," Unc nodded, "Provided we'd had some rain recently. Haven't, though. Fill dirt just won't form up in moist little gobs that stick in a shoe sole when the weather's this dry. Try stepping on some. You'll see."

I'd bombed. And Aunt E. had mentioned the dry weather.

Unc brushed off his hands. "Well, Gus, I guess you'd better—"

"Dirty old meddler!" Wentworth yelled suddenly, coming after Unc with his stick.

I tried to get a fistful of his collar, but he was strong for his age. He whacked me with the stick. I staggered back over the rail, landed in the tulips. Gumley had his armament out. Its presence cooled Wentworth's antics. Also he protested his innocence less every sec.

Unc glanced up at the sun topping the elms. "Well, Woodrow, I imagine we might as well be get-

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ting along to see what your Aunt Ellen has for lunch. I'll have to go down to the store right afterwards. My, you did make an unusual sight sitting there in the flowers in your tapered city pants!"

We ankled. I'd have a smash story to file with the ed.

Suddenly Unc spoke up. "In the words of that dubious paper which arrives in our mailbox every Thursday, Woodrow, I'd say that was a real boffola-type socko ending, wouldn't you?"

"Unc," I said, laughing, "I think I better nix your freebs. Aunt Ellen won't like your lingo. Gee, it's sure good to be home."

EDITORS' NOTE: *Yes, Uncle Pinkerton has become a series character. The second adventure of Unc and Woody is titled "Unc Probes Pickle Plot," and it will appear in EQMM soon . . .*

NEXT MONTH . . .

10 NEW stories—including

HUGH PENTECOST's *Jericho and the Painting Clue*

GERALD KERSH's *Two New Tales of Bo Raymond*

The July 1965 issue will be on sale June 3, 1965.

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GAMES WITH NAMES: *A Fun Quiz*

by JACK LUZZATTO

1. If you don't see anything similar in these 15 authors' names, you'll have to look at the answers (on page 118). Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Philip MacDonald, Mignon G. Eberhart, Earl Derr Biggers, MacKinlay Kantor, John Dickson Carr, Cornell Woolrich, Leslie Charteris, Anthony Berkeley, Donald E. Westlake, Baynard Kendrick, Jacques Futrelle, Vincent Starrett, Edgar Lustgarten.

2. If you don't have mental indigestion by now, you can try the next course: What do the following detective names have in common? Lawrence Treat, Dorothy Salisbury Davis, Craig Rice, Graham Greene, Rex Stout, William Russell, William Irish, O. Henry.

3. If you still haven't got anywhere, try this for homogeneity: John Dickson Carr, R. Austin Freeman, Joseph C. Lincoln, Phyllis Bentley, Raymond Chandler, David Dodge.

4. You know all these authors, but can you decipher their names from the pertinent anagrams in capital letters?

a. His stories are QUICK IN PATTERN.

b. His hero set out to do battle with the CRAVEN SET.

c. He created enough murder plots to qualify himself as a GRAVE WARDEN.

d. Could a BIG ACE THRILL ME with every book he ever wrote?

e. This author can say, every time, I CASH A GREAT HIT.

(Answers on page 118)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HARRY HARRISON**

TITLE: ***I Always Do What Teddy Says***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Somewhere . . .

TIME: . . . in the future

COMMENTS: *The teddy bear looked like an innocent plaything, a harmless toy animal. But Davy's father knew better; and so did "Uncle" Torrence; and so did Eigg . . .*

THE LITTLE BOY LAY SLEEPING, the artificial moonlight of the picture-picture window throwing a pale glow across his untroubled features. He had one arm clutched around his teddy bear, pulling the round face with its staring button-eyes close to his. His father, and the tall man with the black beard, tiptoed silently across the nursery to the side of the bed.

"Slip it away," the tall man said, "then substitute the other."

"No, he would wake up and cry," Davy's father said. "Let me take care of this. I know what to do."

With gentle hands he lay another teddy bear down next to the boy, on the other side of his head, so that the sleeping-cherub face was framed by the wide-eared unsleeping masks of the toy animals. Then he carefully lifted the boy's arm from the original teddy and pulled the bear free. Though this disturbed Davy it did not wake him; he ground his teeth together and rolled over, clutching the substitute toy to his cheek, and within a few moments his quiet breathing was regular and deep again.

The boy's father raised his forefinger to his lips and the other man nodded; they left the room without making a sound, closing the door noiselessly behind them.

"Now we begin," Torrence said, reaching out to take the teddy bear. Torrence's lips were small and glistened redly in his dark beard. The teddy bear twisted in his grip and the black-button eyes rolled back and forth.

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"Take me back to Davy," the teddy said in a thin and tiny voice.

"Let me have it," the boy's father said. "It knows me and won't complain."

The father's name was Numen and, like Torrence, he was a Doctor of Government. In spite of their abilities and rank, both DG's were unemployed by the present government. In this they were similar, but physically they were opposites. Torrence was like a bear, a black bear with hair sprouting thickly on his knuckles, twisting out of his white cuffs, and lining his ears. His beard was full, rising high up on his cheekbones and dropping low on his chest.

Where Torrence was dark, Numen was fair; where Torrence was short and thick, Numen was tall and thin. A thin bow of a man, Numen, bent forward with a scholar's stoop and, though balding now, his hair was blond and it still curled very like the golden ringlets of the boy asleep upstairs. Now he took the toy animal and led the way to the shielded room deep in the house, where Eigg was waiting.

"Give it here—here!" Eigg snapped as they came in, and reached for the teddy bear. Eigg was always like that—in a hurry, surly, his stocky body always clothed in a spotless white laboratory smock. Surly—but they needed him.

"You needn't," Numen said, but Eigg had already pulled the toy from his grasp. "It won't like it—"

"Let me go, let me go . . . !" the teddy bear said with a hopeless shrill.

"It is just a machine," Eigg said coldly, putting it face down on the table and reaching for a scalpel. "You are a grown man, Numen—you should be more logical, have your emotions under greater control. You are speaking with your childhood memories, seeing your own boyhood teddy who was your friend and companion. This is just a machine."

With a quick slash Eigg opened the fabric over the seam seal and touched it: the plastic-fur back gaped like a mouth.

"Let me go, let me go . . ." the teddy bear kept wailing, and its stumpy arms and legs waved back and forth. Both onlookers turned pale.

"Must we . . .?"

"Emotions. Control them," Eigg said, probing with a screwdriver. There was a click and the toy went limp. Eigg began to unscrew a plate in the mechanism.

Numen turned away and found that he had to touch a handkerchief to his face. Eigg was right. He was being emotional, and the teddy was just a machine. How dare he get emotional over it, considering what they had in mind?

"How long will it take?" Torrence looked at his watch, it was a little past 2100.

"We have been over this before

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and discussing it again will not change any of the factors." Eigg's voice was distant as he removed the tiny plate and began to examine the machine's interior with a magnifying probe. "I have experimented on the three stolen teddy tapes, carefully timing myself at every step. I do not count removal or restoration of the tape—it takes only a few minutes for each. The tracking and altering of the tape in both instances took me under ten hours. My best time differed from my worst time by less than fifteen minutes, which is not significant. We can therefore safely say—ahh," he was silent for a moment while he removed the capsule of the memory spools. ". . . we can safely say that this is a ten-hour operation."

"That is too long. The boy is usually awake by seven, and we must have the teddy back by then. He must never suspect that it has been away."

"There is little risk—you can give him some excuse. I will not rush and spoil the work. Now be silent."

The two government specialists could only sit back and watch while Eigg inserted the capsule into the bulky machine he had secretly assembled in the room. This was his specialty, not theirs.

"Let me go . . ." the tiny voice said from the wall speaker, then was interrupted by a burst of static. "Let me go . . . bzzzt . . . no, no, Davy, daddy wouldn't like you to do that . . . fork in left, knife in right . . . bzzzt . . . if you do you'll have to wipe . . . good boy good boy good boy . . ."

The voice squeaked and whispered, on and on, while the hours went by. Numen brought in coffee more than once and toward dawn Torrence fell asleep sitting up in the chair, only to awake with a guilty start. Only Eigg showed no strain or fatigue, working the controls with fingers as regular as a metronome. The reedy voice from the capsule shrilled thinly through the night like the memory of a ghost.

"It is done," Eigg said, sealing the fabric with surgeon's stitches.

"Your fastest time ever." Numen sighed with relief. He glanced at the nursery viewscreen that showed his son, still asleep, starkly clear in the harsh infrared light. "There will be no problem getting it back after all. But is the tape—?"

"It is right, perfect—you heard it. You asked the questions and heard the answers. I have concealed all traces of the alteration and unless you know what to look for you would never find the changes. In every other way the memory and instructions are like all others. There has just been this single change made."

"Pray God we never have to use it," Numen said.

"I did not know that you were a religious man," Eigg said, turn-

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ing to look at him, his face expressionless. The magnifying loupe was still in his eye and it stared, five times the size of his other eye, a large and probing questioner.

"I'm not," Numen said, flushing.

"We must get the teddy back," Torrence broke in. "The boy just stirred."

Davy was a good boy and, when he grew older, a good student in school. Even after he began classes he kept the teddy bear around and talked to it while he did his homework.

"How much is seven and five, teddy?"

The furry toy rolled its eyes and clapped stub paws. "Davy knows . . . shouldn't ask teddy what Davy knows."

"Sure I know—I just wanted to see if you did. The answer is thirteen."

"Davy, the answer is twelve . . . you better study harder, Davy. That's what teddy says."

"Fooled you!" Davy laughed. "Made you tell me the answer!"

He was learning ways to get around the robot controls, permanently fixed to answer the questions of a small child. Teddies have the vocabulary and outlook of the very young because their job must be done during the formative years. Teddies teach diction and life history and morals and group adjustment and vocabulary and grammar and all the other things that enable men to live together as social animals. A teddy's job is done early, in the most plastic stages of a child's life, and by the very nature of its task its conversation must be simple and limited. But effective. Teddies are eventually discarded as childish toys, but by then their job is complete.

By the time Davy became David and was eighteen years old, teddy had long since been retired behind a row of books on a high shelf. It was an old friend that had outgrown its useful days, but it was still a friend and certainly couldn't be discarded.

Not that Davy ever thought of it that way. Teddy was just teddy, and that was that. The nursery was now a study, his crib a bed, and with his eighteenth birthday past, David was packing to go to the university.

He was sealing his bag when the phone bleeped and he saw his father's image on the screen.

"David."

"What is it, father?"

"Would you mind coming down to the library now? There is something rather important—"

David squinted at the screen and noticed for the first time that his father's face had a pinched sick look. His heart gave a quick jump.

"I'll be right down!"

Eigg was there, his arms crossed, and sitting almost at attention. So was Torrence, his father's oldest friend, who, though no relation,

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David had always called Uncle Torrence. And his father, obviously ill at ease about something.

David came in quetly, conscious of all their eyes on him as he crossed the room and took a chair. He was very much like his father, with the same build and height, a relaxed, easy-to-know boy with very few problems in life.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"Not wrong, Davy," his father said. He must be upset, David thought, he hasn't called me Davy in years. "Or rather something *is* wrong, but with the state of the world, and has been for a long time."

"Oh, the Panstentialists," David said, and relaxed a little. He had been hearing about the evils of Panstentialism as long as he could remember. It was just politics; he had been thinking something very personal was wrong.

"Yes, Davy, I imagine you know all about them now. When your mother and I separated I promised to raise you to the best of my ability, and I think I have. But I'm a governor and all my friends work in government, so I'm sure you have heard a lot of political talk in this house. You know our feelings and I think you share them."

"I do—and I think I would have no matter where I grew up. Panstentialism is an oppressing philosophy and one that perpetuates itself in power."

"Exactly. And one man, Barre, is at the heart of it. He stays in the seat of government and will not relinquish it and, with his rejuvenation treatments he will be there for a hundred years more."

"Barre must go!" Eigg snapped. "For twenty-three years now he has ruled and has forbidden the continuation of my experiments. Young man, he has stopped my work for a longer time than you have been alive. Do you realize that?"

David nodded, but did not comment. What little he had read about Eigg's proposed researches into behavioral human embryology had repelled him and, secretly, he was in agreement with Barre's ban on the work. But Panstentialism was different; he was truly in agreement with his father. This do-nothing philosophy placed a heavy and dusty hand on the world of politics —as well as on the world at large.

"I'm not speaking only for myself," Numen said, his face white and strained, "but for everyone in the world and in the system who are against Barre and his philosophy. I have not held a government position for over twenty years—nor has Torrence here—but I think he'll agree that that is a small thing. If our unemployment were a service to the people we would gladly suffer it. Or if our persecution was the only negative result of Barre's evil works we would do nothing to stop him."

"I am in complete agreement." Torrence nodded. The fate of two

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men is of no importance compared with the fate of us all. Nor is the fate of one man."

"Exactly!" Numen sprang to his feet and began to pace agitatedly up and down the room. "If that were not true, if it were not the heart of the problem, I would never consider being involved. There would *be* no problem if Barre fell dead tomorrow."

The three older men were staring at David now, though he didn't know why, and he felt they were waiting for him to say something.

"We'll, yes—I agree. It would be the best thing for the world that I can think of. Barre dead would be of far greater service to mankind than Barre alive has ever been."

The silence lengthened, became embarrassing, and it was finally Eigg who broke it with his dry mechanical tones.

"We are all then in agreement that Barre's death would be of immense benefit. In that case, David, you must also agree that it would be fine if he could be—killed."

"Not a bad idea," David said, wondering where all this talk was going, "though of course it's a physical impossibility. It must be centuries since the last—what's the word, 'murder'?—occured. The developmental psychology work took care of that a long time ago. As the twig is bent—and all that sort of thing. Wasn't that supposed to be the discovery that finally separated man from the lower orders? —the proof that we could entertain the thought of killing and even discuss it, yet still be trained in our early childhood to be utterly incapable of the act. If you can believe the textbooks, the human race has progressed immeasurably since the curse of murder has been removed. Look—do you mind if I ask what this is all about?"

"Barre can be killed," Eigg said in an almost inaudible voice. "There is one man in the world who can kill him."

"Who?" David asked, and in some terrible way he knew the answer even before the words came from his father's trembling lips.

"You, David. You!"

He sat, unmoving, and his thoughts went back through the years, and a number of things that had bothered him were now made clear. His attitudes that were so subtly different from his friends'—and that time with the plane when one of the rotors had killed a squirrel. Little, puzzling things, and sometimes worrying ones that had kept him awake long after the rest of the house was asleep.

Yes, it was true—he knew it beyond the shadow of a doubt; and he wondered why he had never realized it before. But it was like some hideous statue buried in the ground beneath one's feet: it had always been there, but had never been visible until he had dug down and reached it. But he could see it now with all the earth scraped

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from its vile face and all the lineaments of evil clearly revealed.

"You want me to kill Barre?" he asked.

"You're the only one who can, Davy, and it must be done. For all these years I have hoped against hope that it would not be necessary, that the ability you have would not have to be used. But Barre still lives, and for all our sakes he must die."

"There is one thing I don't understand," David said, rising and looking out of the window at the familiar trees and the distant, glass-canopied highway. "How was this change in me brought about? How could I have missed the conditioning that is supposed to be a normal part of everyone's existence?"

"Your teddy bear," Eigg explained. "It is not publicized, but the reaction against killing is established at a very early age by the tapes in the toys every child has. Later education is just reinforcement, valueless without the earlier indoctrination."

"Then my teddy—?"

"I altered its tapes in just that one way, so that part of your education would be missing. Nothing else was changed."

"It was enough." There was a coldness to David's voice that had never existed before. "How is Barre supposed to be killed?"

"With this." Eigg took a package from the table drawer and carefully opened it. "This is a primitive weapon we have removed from a museum. I have repaired it and charged it with projectile devices once called shells." He held the sleek, ugly, black object in his hand. "It is fully automatic in operation. When this device—the trigger—is pulled, a chemical reaction propels a copper and lead weight called a bullet directly from the front orifice. The line of flight of the bullet is along an imaginary path extended from these two grooves on the top of the device. The bullet, of course, falls by gravity, but at a minimum distance—say, a meter—this fall is negligible."

He put it down suddenly on the table. "It is called a gun."

David reached over slowly and picked it up. How well it fitted into his hand, sitting with such precise balance. He raised it, sighting across the grooves, and pulled the trigger. The gun exploded with an immense roar and jumped in his hand.

The bullet plunged into Eigg's chest just over his heart, and with such a great impact that the man and the chair he had been sitting in were hurled backward to the floor. The bullet also tore a great hole in Eigg's flesh and his throat choked with blood. He died at once.

"David! What are you doing?" His father's voice had cracked.

David turned away from the body on the floor, still apparently unmoved by what he had done.

"Don't you understand, father?

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Barre and his Panstentialists are a terrible burden on the world. Many suffer and freedom is abridged and there are all the other things that are so wrong, that we know should not be. But do you see any difference? You yourself said that things will change after Barre's death. The world will move on. How then is Barre's crime worse than the crime of bringing *this* back into existence?"

He shot his father quickly and efficiently before the older man could realize the import of his words and suffer with the knowledge of what was coming.

Torrence screamed and ran to the door, fumbling with terrified fingers for the lock. David shot him too, but not very well since he was farther away, and the bullet lodged in Torrence's body and made him fall. David walked over and ignoring the screamings and bubbled words, took careful aim at the twisting head and blew out the man's brains.

Now the gun was heavy in his hand and he was very tired. The lift shaft took him up to his room and he had to stand on a chair to take teddy down from behind the books on the high shelf. The little furry animal sat in the middle of the large bed and rolled its eyes and wagged its stubby arms.

"Teddy," he said, "I'm going to pull up flowers from the flowerbed."

"No, Davy . . . pulling up flowers is naughty . . . don't pull up flowers." The little voice squeaked and the little arms waved.

"Teddy, I'm going to break a window."

"No, Davy . . . breaking windows is naughty . . . don't break windows."

"Teddy, I'm going to kill a man."

Silence.

Even the teddy's eyes and arms were still.

The roar of the gun broke the silence and the gun blew a ruin of gears, wires, and bent metal from the back of the destroyed teddy bear.

"Teddy, oh, teddy, you should have answered . . . Teddy, I'm going to kill a man."

Silence.

David lifted the gun. "You know I always do what teddy says."

David pulled the trigger. Again the roar of the gun broke the silence and the gun blew a ruin of flesh, veins, and bone from David's head.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

TITLE: ***Express to Stamboul***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Mr. Parker Pyne

LOCALE: Europe

TIME: A generation ago

COMMENTS: *Parker Pyne claimed that he was not a detective. "The human heart," he said, "is my province." True or false? Well, both—as you will see . . .*

PAR ICI, MADAME."

A tall woman in a mink coat followed her heavily encumbered porter along the platform of the Gare de Lyon.

She wore a dark-brown knitted hat pulled down over one eye and ear. The other side revealed a charming tip-tilted profile and little golden curls clustering over a shell-like ear. Typically an American, she was altogether a very charming-looking creature and more than one man turned to look at her as she walked past the high carriages of the waiting train.

Large plates were stuck in holders on the sides of the carriages.

PARIS—ATHENES.

PARIS—BUCHAREST.

PARIS—STAMBOUL.

At the last named the porter came to an abrupt halt. He undid the strap which held the suitcases together and they slipped heavily to the ground. *"Voici, Madame."*

The *wagon-lit* conductor was standing beside the steps. He came forward, remarking, *"Bonsoir, Madame,"* with an empressement perhaps due to the richness and perfection of the mink coat.

The woman handed him her sleeping-car ticket of flimsy paper.

"Number Six," he said. "This way."

He sprang nimbly into the train, the woman following him. As she

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hurried down the corridor after him, she nearly collided with a portly gentleman who was emerging from the compartment next to hers. She had a momentary glimpse of a large bland face with benevolent eyes.

"*Voici, Madame.*" The conductor displayed the compartment. He threw up the window and signaled to the porter. A lesser employee took in the baggage and put it up in the racks. The woman sat down.

Beside her on the seat she had placed a small scarlet case and her handbag. The carriage was hot, but it did not seem to occur to her to take off her coat. She stared out of the window with unseeing eyes.

People were hurrying up and down the platform. There were sellers of newspapers, pillows, chocolate, fruit, mineral waters. They held up their wares to her, but her eyes looked blankly through them. The Gare de Lyon had faded from her sight. On her face were sadness and anxiety.

"If Madame will give me her passport?"

The words made no impression on her. The conductor, standing in the doorway, repeated them. Elsie Jeffries roused herself with a start.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Your passport, Madame."

She opened her bag, took out the passport, and gave it to him.

"That will be all right, Madame, I will attend to everything." A slight significant pause. "I shall be going with Madame as far as Stamboul."

Elsie drew out a fifty-franc note and handed it to him. He accepted it in a businesslike manner, and inquired when she would like her bed made up and whether she was taking dinner.

These matters settled, he withdrew and almost immediately the restaurant man came rushing down the corridor ringing his little bell frantically, and calling out, "*Premier service. Premier service.*"

Elsie rose, divested herself of the heavy fur coat, took a brief glance at herself in the little mirror, and picking up her handbag and jewel case, stepped out into the corridor. She had gone only a few steps when the restaurant man came rushing along on his return journey. To avoid him, Elsie stepped back for a moment into the doorway of the adjoining compartment, which was now empty.

As the restaurant man passed and she prepared to continue her journey to the dining car, her glance fell idly on the label of a suitcase which was lying on the seat.

It was a stout pigskin case, somewhat worn. On the label were the words, "J. Parker Pyne, passenger to Stamboul." The suitcase itself bore the initials "P.P."

A startled expression came over the girl's face. She hesitated a moment in the corridor, then going back to her own compartment she

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picked up a copy of *The Times* which she had laid down on the table with some magazines and books.

She ran her eye down the advertisement columns on the front page, but what she was looking for was not there. A slight frown on her face, she made her way to the dining car.

The attendant allotted her a seat at a small table already tenanted by one person—the man with whom she had nearly collided in the corridor. In fact, the owner of the pigskin suitcase.

Elsie looked at him without appearing to do so. He seemed very bland, very benevolent, and in some way impossible to explain, delightfully reassuring. He behaved in reserved British fashion, and it was not till the fruit was on the table that he spoke.

"They keep these places terribly hot," he said.

"I know," said Elsie. "I wish one could have the window open."

He gave a rueful smile. "Impossible! Every person present except ourselves would protest."

She gave an answering smile. Neither said any more.

Coffee was brought and the usual indecipherable bill. Having laid some notes on it, Elsie suddenly took her courage in both hands.

"Excuse me," she murmured. "I saw your name on your suitcase—Parker Pyne. Are you—are you, by any chance—?"

She hesitated and he came quickly to her rescue.

"I believe I am. That is" —he quoted from the advertisement which Elsie had noticed more than once in *The Times,* and for which she had searched vainly just now, "'Are you happy? If not, consult Mr. Parker Pyne.' Yes, I'm that one, all right."

"I see," said Elsie. "How—how extraordinary!"

He shook his head. "Not really. Extraordinary from your point of view, but not from mine." He smiled reassuringly, then leaned forward. Most of the other diners had left the car. "So you are unhappy?" he said.

"I—" began Elsie, and stopped.

"You would not have said 'How extraordinary' otherwise," he pointed out.

Elsie was silent a minute. She felt strangely soothed by the mere presence of Mr. Parker Pyne. "Ye-es," she admitted at last. "I am—unhappy. At least, I am worried."

He nodded sympathetically.

"You see," she continued, "a very curious thing has happened—and I don't know in the least what to make of it."

"Suppose you tell me about it," suggested Mr. Pyne.

Elsie thought of the advertisement. She and Edward had often commented on it and laughed. She had never thought that she . . . perhaps she had better not. . . . If Mr. Parker Pyne were a charlatan.

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. . . But he looked so nice!

Elsie made her decision. Anything to get this worry off her mind.

"I'll tell you. I'm going to Constantinople to join my husband. He does a lot of Oriental business, and this year he found it necessary to go there. He went a fortnight ago. He was to get things ready for me to join him. I've been very excited at the thought of it. You see, I've never been abroad before. We've been in England six months."

"You and your husband are both American?"

"Yes."

"And you have not, perhaps, been married very long?"

"We've been married a year and a half."

"Happily?"

"Oh, yes! Edward's a perfect angel." She hesitated. "Not, perhaps, very much go to him. Just a little—well, I'd call it straight-laced. Lot of Puritan ancestry and all that. But he's a *dear,*" she added hastily.

Mr. Parker Pyne looked at her thoughtfully for a moment or two, then he said, "Go on."

"It was about a week after Edward had started. I was writing a letter in his study, and I noticed that the blotting paper was all new and clean, except for a few lines of writing across it. I'd just been reading a detective story with a clue in a blotter and so, just for fun, I held it up to a mirror. It really *was* just fun, Mr. Pyne—I mean, I wasn't spying on Edward or anything like that. I mean, he's such a mild lamb one wouldn't dream of anything of that kind."

"Yes, yes. I quite understand."

"The thing was quite easy to read. First there was the word 'wife,' then 'Simplon Express,' and lower down, 'just before Venice would be the best time.'" She stopped.

"Curious," said Mr. Pyne. "Distinctly curious. It was your husband's handwriting?"

"Oh, yes. But I've cudgeled my brains and I cannot see under what circumstances he would write a letter with just those words in it."

"'Just before Venice would be the best time,'" repeated Mr. Parker Pyne. "Distinctly curious."

Mrs. Jeffries was leaning forward looking at him with a flattering hopefulness. "What shall I do?" she asked simply.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Parker Pyne, "that we shall have to wait until just before Venice." He took up a folder from the table. "Here is the schedule time of our train. It arrives at Venice at two twenty-seven tomorrow afternoon."

They looked at each other.

"Leave it to me," said Parker Pyne.

It was five minutes past two. The Simplon Express was eleven minutes late. It had passed Mestre about a quarter of an hour before.

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Mr. Parker Pyne was sitting with Mrs. Jeffries in her compartment. So far the journey had been pleasant and uneventful. But now the moment had arrived when, if anything was going to happen, it presumably would happen.

Mr. Parker Pyne and Elsie faced each other. Her heart was beating fast, and her eyes sought his in a kind of anguished appeal for reassurance.

"Keep perfectly calm," he said. "You are quite safe. I am here."

Suddenly a scream broke out from the corridor.

"Oh, look—look! The train is on fire!"

With a bound Elsie and Mr. Parker Pyne were in the corridor. An agitated woman with a Slav countenance was pointing a dramatic finger. Out of one of the front compartments smoke was pouring in a cloud.

Mr. Parker Pyne and Elsie ran along the corridor. Others joined them. The compartment in question was full of smoke. The first comers drew back, coughing. The conductor appeared.

"The compartment is empty!" he cried. "Do not alarm yourselves, *messieurs et dames. Le feu,* it will be controlled."

A dozen excited questions and answers broke out. The train was running over the bridge that joins Venice to the mainland.

Suddenly Mr. Parker Pyne turned, forced his way through the little pack of people behind him, and hurried down the corridor to Elsie's compartment. The lady with the Slav face was seated in it, drawing deep breaths from the open window.

"Excuse me, Madame," said Parker Pyne. "But this is not your compartment."

"I know. I know," said the Slav lady. *"Pardon.* It is the shock, the emotion—my heart." She sank back on the seat and indicated the open window. She drew her breath in great gasps.

Mr. Parker Pyne stood in the doorway. His voice was fatherly and reassuring. "You must not be afraid," he said. "I do not think for a moment that the fire is serious."

"Not? Ah, what a mercy! I feel restored." She half rose. "I will return to my own compartment."

"Not just yet." Mr. Parker Pyne's hand pressed her gently back. "I will ask you to wait a moment, Madame."

"Monsieur, this is an outrage!"

"Madame, you will remain."

His voice rang out coldly. The woman sat still looking at him when Elsie joined them.

"It seems it was a smoke bomb," she said breathlessly. "Some ridiculous practical joke. The conductor is furious. He is asking everybody—" She broke off, staring at the second occupant of the carriage.

"Mrs. Jeffries," said Mr. Parker

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Pyne, "what do you carry in your little scarlet case?"

"My jewelery."

"Perhaps you would be kind enough to look and see that everything is there."

There was immediately a torrent of words from the Slav lady. She broke into French, the better to do justice to her feelings.

In the meantime Elsie had picked up the jewel case. "Oh!" she cried. "It's unlocked."

". . . *Et je porterai plainte à la Compagnie des Wagons-Lits,*" finished the Slav lady.

"They're gone!" cried Elsie. "Everything! My diamond bracelet. And the necklace Papa gave me. And the emerald and ruby rings. And some lovely diamond brooches. Thank goodness I was wearing my pearls. Oh, Mr. Pyne, what shall we do?"

"If you will fetch the conductor," said Mr. Parker Pyne, "I will see that this woman does not leave this compartment till he comes."

"Scélérat! Monstre!" shrieked the Slav lady. She went on to further insults. The train drew in to Venice.

The events of the next half-hour may be briefly summarized. Mr. Parker Pyne dealt with several different officials in several different languages—and suffered defeat. The suspected lady consented to be searched—and emerged without a stain on her character. The jewels were not on her.

Between Venice and Trieste, Mr. Parker Pyne and Elsie discussed the case.

"When was the last time you actually saw your jewels?"

"This morning. I put away some sapphire earrings I was wearing yesterday and took out a pair of plain pearl ones."

"And all the jewelery was there intact?"

"Well, I didn't go through it all, naturally. But it looked the same as usual. A ring or something like that might have been missing, but not more."

Mr. Parker Pyne nodded. "Now, when the conductor made up the compartment this morning?"

"I had the case with me—in the dining car. I always take it with me. I've never left it except when I ran out just now."

"Therefore," said Mr. Parker Pyne, "that injured innocent, Madame Subayska, or whatever she calls herself, *must* have been the thief. But what the devil did she do with the things? She was only in here a minute and a half—just time to open the case with a duplicate key and take out the stuff—yes, but what next?"

"Could she have handed them to anyone?"

"Hardly. I had turned back and was forcing my way along the corridor. If anyone had come out of this compartment I should have seen them."

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"Perhaps she threw them out of the window to someone."

"An excellent suggestion—only, as it happens, we were passing over the sea at that moment. We were on the bridge."

"Then she must have hidden them in the carriage."

"Let's hunt for them."

With true transatlantic energy Elsie began to look about. Mr. Parker Pyne participated in the search in a somewhat absent fashion. Reproached for not trying, he excused himself.

"I'm thinking that I must send a rather important telegram at Trieste," he explained.

Elsie received the explanation coldly. Mr. Parker Pyne had fallen heavily in her estimation.

"I'm afraid you're annoyed with me, Mrs. Jeffries," he said meekly.

"Well, you've not been very successful," she retorted.

"But, my dear lady, you must remember I am not a detective. Theft and crime are not in my line at all. The human heart is my province."

"Well, I was a bit unhappy when I got on this train," said Elsie, "but nothing to what I am now! I could just cry buckets. My lovely, lovely bracelet—and the emerald ring Edward gave me when we were engaged."

"But surely you are insured against theft?" Mr. Parker Pyne asked.

"Am I? I don't know. Yes, I suppose I am. But it's the *sentiment* of the thing, Mr. Pyne."

The train slackened speed. Mr. Parker Pyne peered out of the window. "Trieste," he said. "I must send my telegram."

"Edward!" Elsie's face lighted up as she saw her husband hurrying to meet her on the platform at Stamboul. For the moment even the loss of her jewelery faded from her mind. She forgot the curious words she had found on the blotter. She forgot everything except that it was a fortnight since she had seen her husband last, and that in spite of being sober and straightlaced he was really a most attractive person.

They were just leaving the station when Elsie felt a friendly tap on the shoulder and turned to see Mr. Parker Pyne. His bland face was beaming good naturedly.

"Mrs. Jeffries," he said, "will you come to see me at the Hotel Tokatlian in half an hour? I think I may have good news for you."

Elsie looked uncertainly at Edward. Then she made the introduction. "This—er—is my husband—Mr. Parker Pyne."

"As I believe your wife wired you, her jewels have been stolen," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "I have been doing what I can to help her recover them. I think I may have news for her in about half an hour."

Elsie looked inquiringly at Ed-

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ward. He replied promptly, "You'd better go, dear. The Tokatlian, you said, Mr. Pyne? Right. I'll see she makes it."

It was just half an hour later that Elsie was shown into Mr. Parker Pyne's private sitting-room. He rose to receive her.

"You've been disappointed in me, Mrs. Jeffries," he said. "Now, don't deny it. Well, I don't pretend to be a magician, but I do what I can. Take a look inside here."

He passed along the table a small stout cardboard box. Elsie opened it. Rings, brooches, bracelet, necklace—they were all there.

"Mr. Pyne, how marvelous! How—how wonderful!"

Mr. Parker Pyne smiled modestly. "I am glad not to have failed you, my dear young lady."

"Oh, Mr. Pyne, you make me feel just mean! Ever since Trieste I've been horrid to you. And now—this. But how did you get hold of them? When? Where?"

Mr. Parker Pyne shook his head thoughtfully. "It's a long story," he said. "You may hear it one day. In fact, you may hear it quite soon."

"Why can't I hear it now?"

"There are reasons," said Mr. Parker Pyne.

And Elsie had to depart with her curiosity unsatisfied.

When she had gone, Mr. Parker Pyne took up his hat and stick and went out into the streets of Pera. He walked along smiling to himself, coming at last to a little café, deserted at the moment, which overlooked the Golden Horn.

On the other side, the mosques of Stamboul showed slender minarets against the afternoon sky. It was very beautiful. Mr. Pyne sat down and ordered two coffees. They came thick and sweet. He had just begun to sip his when a man slipped into the seat opposite. It was Edward Jeffries.

"I have ordered some coffee for you," said Mr. Parker Pyne, indicating the little cup.

Edward pushed the coffee aside. He leaned forward across the table. "How did you know?" he asked.

Mr. Parker Pyne sipped his coffee dreamily. "Your wife will have told you about her discovery on the blotter? No? Oh, but she will tell you—it has slipped her mind for the moment."

He mentioned Elsie's discovery.

"Very well. That linked up perfectly with the curious incident that happened just before Venice. For some reason or other you were engineering the theft of your wife's jewels. But why the phrase 'just before Venice would be the best time'? Why did you not leave it to your—agent—to choose her own time and place?

"And then, suddenly, I saw the point. *Your wife's jewels were stolen before you yourself left London and were replaced by paste duplicates.* But that solution did not satisfy you. You were a high-minded, conscientious young man.

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You have a horror of some servant or other innocent person being suspected. A theft must actually occur—at a place and in a manner which will leave no suspicion attached to anybody of your acquaintance or household.

"Your accomplice is provided with a key to the jewel box and a smoke bomb. At the correct moment she gives the alarm, darts into your wife's compartment, unlocks the jewel case, and flings the paste duplicates into the sea. She may be suspected and searched, but nothing can be proved against her, since the jewels are not in her possession.

"And now the significance of the place chosen becomes apparent. If the jewels had merely been thrown out by the side of the line, they might have been found. Hence the importance of the one moment when the train is passing over the sea.

"In the meantime you make your arrangements for selling the jewelery here. You have only to hand over the stones when the robbery has actually taken place. My wire, however, reached you in time. You obeyed my instructions and deposited the box of jewelery at the Tokatlian to await my arrival, knowing that otherwise I should keep my threat of placing the matter in the hands of the police. You also obeyed my instructions in joining me here."

Edward Jeffries looked at Mr. Parker Pyne appealingly. He was a good-looking young man, tall and fair, with a round chin and very round eyes. "How can I make you understand?" he said hopelessly. "To you I must seem just a common thief."

"Not at all," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "On the contrary, I should say you are almost painfully honest. I am accustomed to the classification of types. You, my dear sir, fall naturally into the category of victims. Now, tell me the whole story."

"I can tell you that in one word—blackmail."

"Yes?"

"You've seen my wife. You realize what an innocent creature she is—without thought or knowledge of evil."

"Yes, yes."

"She has the most marvelously pure ideals. If she were to find out about—about anything I had done, she would leave me."

"I wonder. But that is not the point. What *have* you done, my young friend? I presume this is some affair with a woman?"

Edward Jeffries nodded.

"Since your marriage—or before?"

"Before—oh, before."

"Well, what happened?"

"Nothing—nothing at all. That is the cruel part of it. It was at a hotel in the West Indies. There was a very attractive woman—a Mrs. Rossiter—staying there. Her hus-

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band was a violent man—he had the most savage fits of temper. One night he threatened her with a revolver. She escaped from him and came to my room. She was half crazy with terror. She—she asked me to let her stay there till morning. I—what else could I do?"

Mr. Parker Pyne gazed at the young man, and the young man gazed back with conscious rectitude. Mr. Parker Pyne sighed. "In other words, to put it plainly, you were had for a mug, Mr. Jeffries."

"Really—"

"Yes, yes. A very old trick—but it often comes off successfully with quixotic young men. I suppose, when your approaching marriage was announced, the screw was turned?"

"Yes. I received a letter. If I did not send a certain sum of money, everything would be disclosed to my prospective father-in-law. How I had—had alienated this young woman's affection from her husband; how she had been seen coming to my room. The husband would bring a suit for divorce. Really, Mr. Pyne, the whole thing made me out the most utter blackguard." He wiped his brow in a harassed manner.

"Yes, yes, I know. And so you paid. And from time to time the screw has been put on again."

"Yes. This was the last straw. Our business has been badly hit by the slump. I simply could not lay my hands on any ready money. I hit on this plan." He picked up his cup of cold coffee, looked at it absently, and drank it. "What am I to do now?" he demanded pathetically. "What *am* I to do, Mr. Pyne?"

"You will be guided by me," said Parker Pyne firmly. "I will deal with your tormentors. As to your wife, you will go straight back to her and tell her the truth—or at least a portion of it. The only point where you will deviate from the truth is concerning the actual facts in the West Indies. You must conceal from her the fact that you were—well, had for a mug, as I said before."

"But—"

"My dear Mr. Jeffries, you do not understand women. If a woman has to choose between a mug and a Don Juan, she will choose Don every time. Your wife, Mr. Jeffries, is a charming, innocent, high-minded girl, and the only way she is going to get any kick out of her life with you is to believe that she has reformed a rake."

Edward Jeffries was staring a him open-mouthed.

"I mean what I say," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "At the present moment your wife is in love with you, but I see signs that she may not remain so if you continue to present to her a picture of such goodness and rectitude that it is almost synonymous with dullness."

Edward winced.

"Go to her, my boy," said Mr. Parker Pyne kindly. "Confess ev-

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erything—that is, as many things as you can think of. Then explain that from the moment you met her you gave up all that life. You even stole so that it might not come to her ears. She will forgive you enthusiastically."

"But when there's nothing really to forgive—"

"What is truth?" said Mr. Parker Pyne. "In my experience it is usually the thing that upsets the apple cart! It is a fundamental axiom of married life that you *must* lie to a woman. She likes it! Go and be forgiven, my boy. And live happily ever afterwards. I dare say your wife will keep a wary eye on you in future whenever a pretty woman comes along. Some men would mind that, but I don't think you will."

"I never want to look at any woman but Elsie," said Mr. Jeffries simply.

"Splendid, my boy," said Mr. Parker Pyne. "But I shouldn't let her know that if I were you. No woman likes to feel she's taken on too soft a job."

Edward Jeffries rose. "You really think—?"

"I *know*," said Mr. Parker Pyne, with force.

Answers to JACK LUZZATTO's *Games With Names*

1. There are 15 authors, and all their names are exactly 15 letters long. *(Editors' Note: The 15 names have something else in common: all 15 authors have been published in EQMM.)*

2. You can eat or drink them all. I didn't dare include Robert L. Fish—after all, you do want to be mystified a bit, don't you? Note: O. Henry's real surname was Porter, and William Russell published under the name of "Waters." *(Editors' Note: See Editors' Note above.)*

3. Of course, they're all big wheels and you can drive off in every one of them. I deliberately omitted Leslie Ford—you don't want it too easy, do you? *(Editors' Note: See Editors' Note above.)*

4. How did you make out?
   a. QUICK IN PATTERN: Patrick Quentin
   b. CRAVEN SET: Cervantes
   c. GRAVE WARDEN: Andrew Garve
   d. BIG ACE THRILL ME: Michael Gilbert
   e. I CASH A GREAT HIT: Agatha Christie
   (Editors' Note: See Editors' Note above.)

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a *new* crime story by
KATHERINE DUNHAM

Can a story combine charm and chill? Can a story about murder—in broad daylight and on a saint's day—touch the heart? Can a story about a "triangle" be different from any tale you've ever read? Yes, indeed—for here is a story that is distinguished in its simple but deeply sincere writing, in its simple but deeply realized characters, in its simple but deeply colorful background . . .

The author is a world-famous choreographer, dancer, and anthropologist. She once wrote: "The dancing of my group is called anthropology in New Haven, sex in Boston, and in Rome—art." (She could say the same perhaps about this story.)

Katherine Dunham studied primitive and native dances in the Caribbean and then founded an all-Negro dance troupe which toured the world. She is recognized as an expert in all forms of dancing—from the Twist ("We've been doing it for years, only we called it the Florida Swamp Shimmy") to the ballet; and she writes like an angel . . .

THE DEVIL'S ACCOMPLICE

by KATHERINE DUNHAM

THE CRIME WAS ALL THE WORSE because it was committed in broad daylight, on a saint's day, right in the public square between the bureau of El Senor Capitan and the church of Our Lady of Consolation. It was indeed a terrible thing, but worse than the crime itself was the fact that the prisoner would not talk. Not to the priest or to the worried little *soldado* who stood guard over him or to the fat Chief of Police who picked his teeth and belched and thanked the Virgin that he had had time to finish his meal before he saw the thing that had just happened . . .

Puerto Plata is hot at any time of the year, but in August it is deadly. The crime offered a good excuse for the men to stay in the streets, and though of course there had to be two sides for decency's sake, the originality of the crime had made Pablo a hero by midnight.

In Lucilla's rum shop someone with a guitar began to sing a plaintive song about saint's day and the crime in broad daylight and the pool of blood in the square separat-

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ing the bureau of El Senor Capitan from the church of Our Lady of Consolation. The verses were so touching that soon everyone was weeping and slouching against his neighbor. Finally, being hard-working men, they fell asleep where they were or wandered tipsily down the narrow cobbled streets to bang on the door of some tightly shut white-plaster *casita.*

The women were conspicuously absent from the rum shop and the streets. Some fell into restless sleep after having crossed themselves before the household Virgin. Others lay in bed quaking from head to foot, waiting for the heavy tread of their men returning from the rum shop.

Before them they saw the crime in all its goriest details—the women of Puerto Plata would be very little trouble for some time to come. Meals would be served promptly, and there would be no quibbling about where the money went and no scolding about late hours.

No wonder Pablo Martinez was almost a hero among men. For that one night, anyway . . .

Pablo sat on the edge of the hard slab of wood that served the prison cell as a bed. After scratching most of the night, he threw the rattling old mattress stuffed with dried banana leaves to the floor and continued the night sitting. The little *soldado* paced back and forth for a while in front of the cell; then overcome by heat and emotion, he crossed himself and sank into a deep sleep. It was not he who had committed the crime. Let the fellow in there sit up all night. An innocent man should sleep. The *soldado* began to snore.

Early the next morning the attack on Pablo's fortress of silence was resumed. The wooden doors and shutters of the courtroom were barred and a group arranged themselves around the prisoner. The cell had been too small for comfort and the Chief of Police felt that, a single attack having failed the night before, perhaps a haranguing from all quarters might be more effective. If only he could put in his report that the man was crazy! But someone might investigate, and to all appearances the man was perfectly sane—and there had not been the faintest smell of rum on his breath when he was taken in.

The priest settled himself in his dirty black robes and began to pray. The young lieutenant, assistant to the Chief of Police, was new on the job, and he didn't like it a bit, especially because of the prisoner's wooden leg and the way Pablo had come by it. The Chief of Police was disgusted. *Carramba!* Papa Trujillo himself (he spat, then quickly crossed himself, looking guiltily to left and right as though his thoughts might have been read and already reported) could not make the man talk.

"There is only one thing left,

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papito." The Chief bent closer to Pablo, took his knife from his belt, and very slowly and emphatically drew the back of it across his own throat, making at the same time a very suggestive noise.

Pablo surprised them by beginning to cry. Very softly, so that there was scarcely any sound—only a sort of whimpering, full of heart-rending desolation and grief. The priest sat up and took hope. The *soldado* leaned forward anxiously, and the Chief of Police motioned the *secretario* to approach with his notebook.

But Pablo did not talk—he only wept. Nothing for the record but tears. That alone, with the bare impersonal details of the crime, would reach the *Jefe* at Ciudad Trujillo. Such behavior was most unbecoming for anyone claiming Spanish ancestry.

Sighing, the Chief of Police gave up and sent Pablo back to his cell until orders should arrive from the Capital.

Pablo Martinez was not a young man, nor was he old. His wife Maria would vouch for that, a man's wife often being the best judge of his years. Indeed, Maria and the foreman of the docks where Pablo loaded coffee from sunrise to siesta, from after siesta to dusk, would both put Pablo on the youngish side. But both would agree that Pablo had one major vice—cockfighting.

In all other respects Pablo was a model husband—not like the village men who would stay up all night drinking and carousing and occasionally paying for their pleasures in the room over Lucilla's *cantina*. Pablo was more a man of the soil.

He and Maria lived a short distance from the village where the hills began behind Puerto Plata. In their younger days they had raised coffee on their own small patch of land and carried it in sacks to sell in town. Later on, times were bad and it was easier to work for someone else. It was not so good, of course, that the kind Papa Trujillo had seen fit to confiscate most of their land, leaving only a little white hut and a small garden space closed in by a dusty-white mud wall. But then, Pablo had never known just how big a patch belonged to him after all, and therefore the good Papa Trujillo knew best. A thought to the contrary never even crossed Pablo's mind.

As the seasons passed and there was less and less land for planting coffee, Maria scratched small market produce from the garden and plaited straw brooms which she carried to town on her head, and Pablo worked on the docks and more frequently than not lost most of his earnings at cockfighting. Some day, Pablo was confident, he would raise a cock that would massacre every other cock on the island. Indeed, he was sure that he had

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such a cock when the accident occurred.

Pablo was trudging the dusty road to Puerto Plata, carrying his prize cock to its first fight. It was a Sunday afternoon. Papa Trujillo was late for an appointment across the border with his not too distant relative, the resident of Haiti (that was before the border war) and his long retinue of shiny black cars had no time to waste. They sped down the country road, bristling with khaki uniforms and rifles, and no one bothered to notice the dusty little man with the red cock.

The first long black car hit Pablo, jammed on the brakes, then, without so much as a pause proceeded at break-neck speed to the border rendezvous. The next car and the next, and so on right down the line, swerved around the dusty bundle in the road. But the last car stopped, and soldiers descended, swung Pablo, still clutching his bird, into the back seat, and kept straight ahead to Monte Cristi (it was easier than turning around on the narrow road) and deposited the two of them at the Government Health Station which was closed Saturday and Sunday and fiesta days, but which opened out of respect for the official uniforms.

In the little improvised surgery Pablo fainted several times and came to as often, each time calling for the beloved cock. Not until they brought it to him did he lose consciousness completely—luckily before he had time to notice that the cock was minus a leg from below the first joint.

The good Fathers at the Station decided to care for the fowl and made quite a pet out of it while Pablo was recovering from the amputation of his leg. By the time Pablo and the cock were released from the Station, the cock was no longer the fighter to conquer the whole of the island and show everybody; it was but a spiritless, complacent, overfattened rooster, hopping awkwardly on one leg.

Poor Pablo wept when he saw this, though he merely shrugged over his own leg, and set about to learn to walk on the wooden one which had been sent him by El Presidente with his very best compliments and regrets. In time Maria came for him in a wooden cart which she had borrowed from a neighbor, and they returned slowly and sadly to the little hut above Puerto Plata. Maria wept all the way and lamented and told of the misery which she had undergone and how the market for straw brooms had fallen. Pablo stroked the rooster and wept also, but not for the same reason.

"Ai ya, viejo mio," he said, when he was alone with the cock. "You and I are both old and no good now. No one will want us. I cannot work for you, you cannot work for me." His tears baptized the shining red comb of the rooster. He whittled a little leg out of a fine piece of

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cane and attached it to the feathery stump. When the cock kicked it off, Pablo wept again.

Maria bore her burden well, considering. Pablo would sit under the dried-up coffee bushes in the little patio and talk to his pet and separate the reed grasses for the brooms and twist the handles. But there was the task of finding the reeds and canes, and Maria was not too young and Pablo could get around none too well; so things went from bad to worse.

Their few neighbors passed them by because Maria was always complaining and sullen, and Pablo would keep his eyes on the ground and say little. The foreman visited them and brought some supplies, but this was embarrassing and Maria sighed for days after, all the while eating as much of the salt fish and *frijoles* as her stomach could hold.

One day Pablo sensed danger in the air. The foreman's supplies had given out and they were again reduced to roasted yams and boiled plantain. Meat was unheard of. Still, there was always a handful of beans or a little boiled cornmeal for the fowl, with Pablo sitting silently in one corner or another stroking it lovingly.

Maria went from contempt to tearful self-pity to abuse. She would accuse the rooster of having taken over affections legally and naturally belonging to her. She would even hint that Pablo might just as well have had something else amputated while he was at it, for all the good he did her as the man in the house.

Then one day she became unusually friendly and pleasant, and suggested that they might as well eat the fowl since it was not any good to anyone and never would be. Pablo, like a mother lioness protecting her cub, drew the rooster to him and snarled at Maria. She looked for a moment in terror, then ran shrieking from the house. She was sure that the cock was none other than the devil in the form of a one-legged rooster, and that Pablo had fallen under its control. From then on, that's the way things were—Maria at a distance eyeing the cock, the cock eyeing Maria, and Pablo eyeing both of them.

Finally Pablo made a decision. While Maria was at market with a few badly made brooms, he pulled himself together, hooked on his wooden leg, and stumped off into the hills. After much laborious climbing, he uncovered a cozy little hiding place on the other side of a small cave where there was sunlight and a bed of red clay and a thin stream of good-tasting water.

After that he would wait every day until Maria was at market or busy hunting grasses, then he would steal a handful of beans or gather some stale crumbs and climb to the cave. Before he arrived he would begin talking to the cock.

"Hola, macho! Que tal, viejito mio! We have fooled the old wom-

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an again. We are clever, we are. She has a head only good for a beating and a tongue only good for foul language. What could she know of our conversations?"

And the cock would begin, from a distance, to flop about and hop toward the entrance of the cave and crow with pleasure.

The first day Maria had been startled, then pleased, to see Pablo alone beneath the coffee bushes, sorting grasses and chewing on a piece of sugar cane. She looked sharply to all sides, then darted into the hut. There Pablo could hear rattling among the iron pots at the fireplace; he grinned broadly when he imagined her disappointment as she peered into the empty stewing pot.

She came out of the house and regarded him sourly. Neither of them spoke a word for the rest of the day, which was customary nowadays anyway. Pablo missed his companion sorely and it seemed that the next dawn and Maria's departure in search of river reeds would never come.

The days went by, and after a while Pablo knew that Maria was not as easily fooled as he had hoped. But just as a warning, he always glared at her angrily and fingered his machete just to let her know what would happen if she tried to follow him. He wanted to make certain that her fear of Pablo the man as well as Pablo the devil's accomplice would keep her away.

"This has taught me one thing, *chico*," he confided to the cock. "There is only one way for a man to run his own house, and that is to keep a woman in her place."

The rooster crowed lazily and helped himself to more crumbs from Pablo's pocket.

For a while things seemed to go better, though there was still no meat in the pot and the broom market had declined further. But Maria stopped complaining and even talked a little over the meagre evening meal. Bits of market gossip usually, but lately almost entirely about the fiesta at the church of Our Lady of Consolation.

They had never been religious people, even in the old days—Mass, of course, on important saint's days and Christmas and Holy Friday. The fiestas of the lesser saints were days for laboring in the fields, later to trudge into town and drink a little *tafia* and walk around a bit among the crowds. For this reason Pablo could not understand Maria's sudden interest in the coming saint's day, nor her plans for him to go to Mass.

Then he remembered that he was also Pablo possessed of the devil, and he smiled. Well, to humor the old lady he would go. *Carrambal* Living at ease like this he was almost feeling himself a man again. Perhaps if she kept up her good humor he might even take the trouble of proving it to her.

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The sun streamed through the cracks in the thatched roof and awakened Pablo as usual, but something in the air was different. There was a feeling of festivity which brought back with a rush the old days.

A candle burned in front of the freshly dusted figure of the Virgin in the little niche over the door. Maria had swept the hearth clean, and was bent over, head down, in the rust-covered iron trunk. Her copious bottom turned up to the roof was too much of a temptation to a man in good spirits, and Pablo hopped to his one leg and thwacked her soundly with the wooden one which lay beside him.

"*Hola,* old mare! Putting me out among people again are you, for them to stare and say 'There goes the man with one leg. He's no good any more.' Well," he strapped his wooden leg to his stump and paraded the length of the hut, "we'll show 'em, won't we, my pet!"

He forgot himself and began an imaginary conversation with the rooster. Maria stood up from the trunk, Pablo's faded Sunday coat clutched to her bosom, her jaw fallen, and with such a look of consternation on her face that Pablo stopped short in his tracks and laughed heartily—his first laugh in months.

"There, there," he said. "I haven't been completely taken over by the devil. Of course, I wouldn't be taking him to Mass. Of course not."

And he stretched and began to dress while Maria brushed his coat and polished his one shoe and smoothed out the battered black felt hat. To tease Maria, Pablo began to lift the lids from the pots and comment on their contents.

"Hmm. *Frijoles* and boiled yams for a change, but I still don't see the meat. What, a saint's day and no meat! Not just one little piece of chicken?"

He playfully plucked Maria under the arm so that she blushed and even giggled a little. Yes, surely it was like old times again.

Pablo held himself as upright as he could considering the wooden leg and a rheumatic pain or two that had developed during his life of inactivity. He thumped down the mountainside and raised a dust on the open road. All along the road people were going into town, and some drew up their carts and offered him a ride. But he waved them on.

Once inside the gloomy church his spirits fell. Why had he promised Maria to come here, anyway? This was just a reminder of his many sins. He knelt dejectedly on his one knee and thought of his friend up there in the cave who was perhaps a little hungry and lonely by now. The priest mumbled and the people groaned and wept and little girls and boys in white paper clothes paraded up and down with candles and painted wax fig-

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ures and cakes and sweetmeats and wine for the altar of Our Lady of Consolation.

Pablo slipped out into the streets where the gaiety was commencing. Some of his friends stopped him and pounded him on the back as they embraced him and told him how well he looked and how becoming his wooden leg was. Some looked at him strangely and he knew that they had heard tales from the women at the market place where Maria sold her brooms.

It was nice to poke around town a bit, but soon he became restless. "*Ai ya.* Give me my mountains and my pet. And," he added with a sly smile, "my old Maria, after all!"

The thought of Maria reminded him that he had promised to burn a candle for her soul and his at precisely ten o'clock. Strange ways these women have of wanting things done just so.

But here it was ten on the dot and since the church was right at hand, Pablo slipped back in and hobbled as silently as possible to the altar so as not to draw the attention of the dozing priest. At the last moment, however, instead of praying to the Virgin for the soul of Maria, he breathed a prayer for his friend, the little red cock. He left the church feeling himself very clever at having put one over on his old woman.

On the way home Pablo was gayer than ever, singing a little and tossing his hat in the air once or twice when no one was looking. Life was better today. By now Maria would be ready with the dinner and they would eat the pots clean, this being a saint's day. After that a siesta, and then, who knows—there's no better time for a man to prove himself than in the day after a full meal and a good nap.

Maria met him at the gate. She was in a bright, flowered gown that had also come out of the trunk. But since, in spite of their poverty, Maria had continued to grow wider as she grew older, the dress had to be split down the front to get around her at all. Pablo found her soiled white underskirt enticing. He smacked her again on the bottom, this time letting his hand wander a bit.

"*Ai,* Pablo *mio,*" she said warmly, "I have everything all ready. And to surprise you this morning I sold two brooms to Maria Hernandez for a little hen! So now we must feast for Our Lady of Consolation and forget that we are poor."

She bustled about, spreading a white cloth on the table, and Pablo was glad to sit and rest his stump. He settled himself under the coffee bushes and was dozing when Maria called him. As they sat down to the table she stopped suddenly and the old look came back to her face.

"Did you remember the candles?" she asked a little sharply.

"Ah, yes, *palomacita mia,*" Pablo answered her, smiling secretly to

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himself, "and two better prayers were never offered to Our Lady, believe me."

They smacked their lips over the chicken stewed in oil and garlic and red and green peppers. There was fried cornmeal and the boiled yams were especially good. The chicken was a little tough, but then, what could one expect for only two brooms with times as bad as they were right now.

When the last bit had been scraped from the bottom of the pot and the feast had been reduced to a pile of chewed bones in front of each plate, Pablo rose and stretched himself.

"Now, old woman," he said, "I've got a little trip to make. When I return, the siesta."

He winked as he stuck his hand into the clay pot of dried beans, making no effort to conceal his action. Maria continued to lick her fingers, and fondly picked over the bones. *Dios!* How that woman could eat!

As Pablo neared the mouth of the cave he began his usual conversation. "Hi, *muchacho!* You think I'd forget you, huh? Well, not only beans today but a little piece of something special. Something like maybe a little *platano,* eh?"

But there was no response—not even a feeble crowing, much less the usual flapping of wings and hopping about.

At the entrance of the cave Pablo stopped short. He did not need to go farther; he already knew everything, and his one knee buckled under him as though made entirely of water, while a cold sweat oozed out all over his face. He clung to the wall of the cave as his gorge rose.

Rid of his dinner, Pablo drew his machete from its leather case slung under his arm and began to sharpen it on a rock at the entrance of the cave. Then he started down the mountainside, slowly at first, stopping now and then to hone the blade a little more. As he neared the hut he began to run, as best he could with the wooden leg and the sick feeling in his stomach and in his heart.

Maria was rolled up in her sleeping mat, dirty and fat and still greasy around the mouth. Pablo leaned over her, scarcely breathing, his face twisted with grief and hatred. The machete was raised over Maria's breast, not to plunge into her but to slice a bit—to separate the joints as she had done to his friend.

In her sleep Maria smiled. Suddenly the smile became a foolish grin of terror. She turned gray and murmured, *"Santa Madre de Dios!"* and beads of water rose on her oily brow. By the time she started up wildly, opening her eyes and beating blindly into space, it was too late. She swayed for a moment, horror-struck at the sight of Pablo the Devil with the machete streaked with blood along the edge, grasping

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the doorpost as he raised it for another stroke.

Her own blood streaming from her breast meant nothing to her. Maria turned and ran shrieking from the hut, missing the second downstroke of the machete by the fraction of an inch. Pablo swore and took out after her, dragging the wooden leg and cursing Papa Trujillo for the first time. Maria continued to scream as she ran, but there was no one to hear because all the neighbors were at the fiesta.

She was far ahead of him in the descent from the mountain. On the open road, however, she began to stagger and Pablo to gain. She could see him, his machete raised high and his face set in the terrible mask she had just seen in her dream, and she knew that it was the Devil.

They went on like this in the blinding afternoon sun, Maria leaving a trail of blood in the white dust and Pablo drawing a crooked line with his wooden leg.

Maria fancied that she could hear the heavy breathing of Pablo the Devil behind her, and grasping her mutilated breast, she commended her soul to the Virgin and in a last desperate effort half ran, half crawled down the deserted cobbled streets of Puerto Plata and into the square before the church.

She was too feeble to cry out as she neared the crowd, and they were all too busy being gay or drunk to notice the woman. Then someone saw the stream of blood, and as Maria fell, the women near her screamed and everyone fell back in horror.

They did not even see Pablo as he pushed his way through them, panting, tears and perspiration running from his face; then suddenly they became aware of the wild little man hacking away at the already lifeless lump of flesh.

After that, things happened all at once, and before one could count the first three beads, Pablo was in his cell and the street cleaners were busy scrubbing up so the fiesta could go on. But of course no one felt like a fiesta any more, and that was the end of the celebration for the *Santa,* except for those who hurried to the church to pray again.

The letter finally came from the *Jefe* at Trujillo. Everything was arranged and the only trouble was to keep the people down from the walls of the jail yard. The soldiers lined up ten paces away from the wall, and the few officials and prominent citizens who had been allowed inside the enclosure were farther back, chewing on black cigars and pulling their mustaches, all anticipation.

The tops of the low walls were packed with eager, staring townspeople. Some were bold enough to slide down from the walls and stand around under the trees in the yard. Every once in a while the Chief of Police blew his whistle and the *soldados* turned and waved

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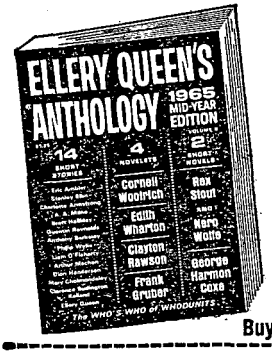
their guns at the walls: the people slid off, waited a moment or two, then climbed back again.

Pablo stood, a small, shrunken figure, as dusty and colorless as the wall to which he clung. At the last moment he unfastened the wooden leg which El Presidente had given him and stood there, swaying a little, but erect on his one leg. He refused the handkerchief to bind his eyes and this made such an impression on the assemblage on top of the walls that there were *"Vivas"* and a *"Bravo"* or two.

The Chief of Police shouted, *"Silencio!"* Then there was nothing else to do, so he gave the order for attention and then the order to fire. The one leg gave way and Pablo went over sideways. As he sank to the ground they could all see his lips move. Of course they all thought that he was offering a prayer for himself, or at least for his dead wife. But even if they had heard they would not have understood.

In Puerto Plata—and over the whole island, in fact—they continued to speak of the crime for many days, even for weeks and months. If only it had not been in broad daylight and on a saint's day and right in the public square, Papa Trujillo might have done something about it, especially in view of the wooden leg. That is, if only Pablo had made an effort to explain himself.



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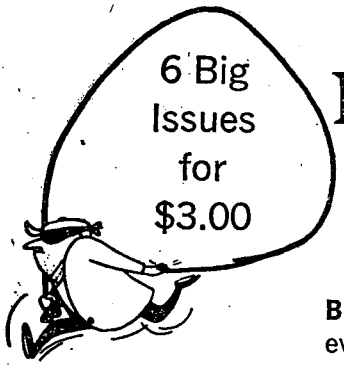

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The Crime Writers Association (London) has changed the rules for its annual awards to admit foreign as well as British books, with excellent results: Best crime novel of 1964 (all comers): H. R. F. Keating, THE PERFECT MURDER (Dutton, $3.95). Best novel (foreign): Patricia Highsmith, THE TWO FACES OF JANUARY (Crime Club, $3.50). Runners-up (all comers): Gavin Lyall, THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME (Scribner's, $3.95); Ross Macdonald, THE CHILL (Knopf, $3.95; Bantam F2913, 50¢).

★★★★ **FOR KICKS, *by Dick Francis*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Best book yet by fast-rising novelist, beautifully combining detection, character analysis and vivid picture of English racing.

★★★★ **THE QUILLER MEMORANDUM, *by Adam Hall*** (Simon & Schuster, $4.50)

Hard, convincing and often surprising story of counterespionage in West Berlin—this season's closest rival to John le Carré.

★★★ **PROGENY OF THE ADDER, *by Leslie H. Whitten*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

Good solid police-procedural novel of D. C. which turns gradually and startlingly into quite another kind of book.

★★★ **I LOVE YOU, I HATE YOU, DROP DEAD!, *by Artie Shaw*** (Fleet, $4.50)

3 novelets (2 on criminous themes) of the war between men and women prove the great clarinetist to be equally gifted with the typewriter.

★★★ **IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT, *by John Ball*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)

California Negro sleuth on a case in the deep South is a most timely situation; and Virgil Tibbs has the makings of a Great Detective.

★★★ **THE SUPERINTENDENT'S ROOM, *by Jeffrey Ashford*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Another high-grade procedural about Don Kerry, "The D. I."

Ellery Queen dept.: E. Q., editor, presents ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY: 1965 MID-YEAR EDITION (Davis, $1.25), a grand collection of 20 stories from *EQMM* 1945-60, especially starring Rex Stout and Edith Wharton. E. Q., author-detective, offers QUEENS FULL (Random, $3.95), containing 2 short-shorts and 3 fine, characteristically intricate novelets.

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THE LADY HAD NINE LIVES

by PATRICK QUENTIN

(continued from page 51)

There was nothing of the casual young man about Timothy Trant as he started a swift search of the bathroom. The panther was on the trail now . . . He turned off the spigots in the washbasin and opened up the waste pipe.

It was clear why the murderer had left the spigots running. The water, overflowing the rim, had poured down on the tiles and obliterated whatever traces of footsteps or dirt might have been left.

There had probably been another motive, too. Running water soon attracts attention. The murderer had deliberately planned for the body to be discovered while the guests arrived for the party—while all the suspects were on the scene of the crime.

Timothy hurried to the telephone in the empty bedroom. Connected with Jervis, he told him to come right over. Then he moved to the living-room door. The sound of voices warned him that the guests were arriving.

When Timothy entered Tolfrey's living room, he found it unexpectedly crowded. Robert Bristol was pouring cocktails with the help of the blase and exquisite Derek Muir. The Princess Walonska, Beatrice Kennet, Gilda Dawn, and Susan Hobart sat together on a settee. Madeleine Price stood nervously by the window.

Timothy's entrance cut through the various threads of conversation. All gazes shifted uneasily to him. Derek Muir lifted the too-perfect arches of his eyebrows and drawled, "Mr. Tolfrey summoned us all here by telegram to witness the unmasking of the murderer. But where, policeman, is Mr. Tolfrey?"

Very slowly Timothy crossed to the table and picked up a cocktail. He turned, so that he faced all of them. When he spoke, there was an edge of steel beneath the soft casualness of his tone. "I'm afraid that Mr. Tolfrey won't be with us tonight."

"You mean we're not going to hear the solution?" asked Robert Bristol disappointedly.

"Exactly."

Susan Hobart's tiny hand fluttered to her throat in a gesture of relief. Beatrice Kennet's boyish face puckered in a scowl. "What a waste of time," she said.

"Then there's no point in our staying any longer." The Princess Walonska rose, drawing her wrap more closely around her.

As she moved toward the door, Timothy caught a glimpse of some-

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thing silver gleaming beneath her coat. "One moment, Princess." He sprang swiftly to her side and extracted from under her arm a silver-framed photograph.

A faint flush stained the white coral of the Princess' cheeks. "Oh, it —it's just a picture of my husband," she faltered. "I was—er—borrowing it from Mr. Tolfrey because I haven't got a copy of this particular one."

"I can understand, Princess," said Timothy quietly "why you should have hated to have the police know your husband was acquainted with Mr. Tolfrey. I can also understand why you wouldn't want even the photograph of so illustrious a man contaminated by proximity to murder."

"Murder!"

Timothy's gaze moved like lightning, taking in each individual reaction to the word. Susan Hobart gasped. Beatrice Kennet's alert glance flashed to the professionally composed face of the Lotus Lady. Derek Muir flicked a particle of cigarette ash from an immaculate sleeve, while Robert Bristol ran a hand through his already untidy hair.

But Timothy was most conscious of Madeleine Price. The secretary's face was drawn, almost gaunt.

"You mean . . . ?" she began.

"Yes—" Timothy's knuckles rapped softly on the glass front of Prince Walonski's photograph. "Didn't any of you know that our host is lying in the bathroom—murdered?"

"Who's talking about murder?"

They all swung round at a voice from the door. A man stood on the threshold, a bronzed, athletic man.

"Johnny!" The word came from Susan Hobart in a little strangled sigh.

But even before she spoke, Timothy had recognized this unexpected guest. He was Mrs. Van Heuten's first visitor, John Hobart —alias John Smith.

Half an hour later the hotel apartment was teeming with activity. The medical examiner, the photographer and the fingerprint expert monopolized the bathroom; in the living room Sergeant Danvers detained all guests.

Detective Trant and Inspector Jervis were in conference in the bedroom. Almost apologetically, Timothy explained his reasons for having feared that Tolfrey would be in danger.

"Tolfrey fooled us," he explained wearily, "by coming round from his drunk sooner than we expected. He fooled himself by trying to be smart and sending those telegrams."

As Timothy had expected, the water on the tiles had obliterated all clues in the bathroom. And the medical examiner had little to offer. The knife had found the heart, and the blow must have been struck shortly before Timothy's arrival.

A haggard Danvers, appearing

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from the living room, announced that he was having the suspects looked over by the hotel staff, but that he was none too optimistic of results. "In a big hotel like this any one of them could have sneaked up by the stairs and done the job then gone away, and come back again as a guest."

This general negativity was only increased when Timothy and Jervis started to interview the suspects in turn. Derek Muir, Madeleine Price, and the four women all claimed to have arrived at Tolfrey's apartment after Timothy and Robert Bristol had put in their appearance. Patricia Walonska flatly refused to comment on her surprising theft of her husband's photograph.

"One large blank," muttered Jervis after the Princess had swept ominously back to the living room.

"Not quite a blank," murmured Timothy. "There's still the latest arrival to consider—Susan Hobart's husband."

The only one of Mrs. Van Heuten's visitors whom Timothy had never interviewed strolled into the bedroom. There was a faintly derisive smile in his eyes as he answered Timothy's questions about Mrs. Van Heuten's murder.

Yes, he had flown in from Winton on business and had dropped in to see his old friend Clara about some articles on polo. When he had left her she was the picture of activity and well-preserved charm. The alias was dismissed with a nonchalant shrug. Having received a great deal of publicity as a sportsman and the "Cinderella" husband of America's heiress sweetheart, he always traveled as John Smith to avoid publicity. He had kept up the incognito at the Advice Bureau to amuse Clara.

"I don't know," he murmured, "whether or not alibis are still in fashion. If they are, you may have noticed that I have a perfect alibi for the time of poor Clara's death. I was on the Winton plane."

"We did notice that Mr. Hobart," agreed Timothy. "And I rather suspect you'll have an alibi for this murder, too."

A faint flush tinged the bronze of John Hobart's cheeks. "As a matter of fact, I have. I don't know when Tolfrey was killed, but as I came straight here from the Newark airport, I presume I am once more immune from suspicion."

Timothy glanced casually at his hands. "As so obvious an outsider in this case, Mr. Hobart, I'd be interested to know whether you have any theory about Tolfrey's death."

Hobart shrugged. "Tolfrey was just one of those drunks about town. Any thug might have killed him."

"So you knew Tolfrey?" said Timothy.

"Why—er—yes." Hobart's lithe body shifted uneasily in his chair. He added lamely, "Everyone knew Tolfrey."

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Timothy was smiling now. He was still smiling when John Hobart explained his reasons for this second sudden visit to New York. The late John Smith claimed that his wife had telephoned him from the Princess' to tell him she was involved in the murder. He had dashed to New York to be at her side. He had called the Princess' house from the airport, and learning that the four women had come to Tolfrey's apartment, he had followed them.

Timothy made no comment, and John Hobart moved out of the room, not quite so jauntily as he had entered it.

The door from the living room opened again almost immediately, to reveal Sergeant Danvers and a flushed, furiously indignant girl with green eyes.

"Thought you might like to see her, Trant," said the sergeant. "I spotted her slipping out of the hotel."

Timothy looked at the girl, a wry smile on his lips. "How inefficient of you, Mrs. Bristol, to have put yourself once again on the scene of the crime."

Helen Bristol thrust out her determined jaw. "I never even knew of this Mr. Tolfrey's existence. I was merely visiting a friend here at the Regina."

"Mr. Larry Graves of Salter's publishing house?" queried Timothy.

The girl nodded. "He lives here. I've been with him all the evening."

"And he can give you an alibi?" Timothy shrugged. "But of course your prospective second husband *would* give you an alibi."

The green eyes flashed dangerously. "What are you going to do?"

"Just bear you in mind, Mrs. Bristol." Timothy nodded to the door. "Goodbye."

After the girl had left, Timothy turned swiftly to the Inspector. "There's just one thing I have to do right away. Then maybe we'll be going to town. . . ."

Timothy dashed back to his apartment. He had a pretty shrewd idea now what Mrs. Van Heuten's non-literary business had been, but he could not be certain unless he were able to prove that most of her visitors had not, as they had claimed, gone to the bureau for literary advice. Apart from the manuscripts which they had all given him, there was nothing to back up their statements. It was to these stories that Timothy now turned his attention.

He dropped into a chair, piling the various manuscripts on the arm. He began by skimming Bobby Bristol's long and hectically typed novel which had been turned down by Salter's. It was clear why this involved, rather hysterical work should not have found favor with publishers, but its central feminine character fascinated Timothy in that she was obviously a portrait of Helen Bristol. Equally obvious

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was the fact that the author was desperately in love with his wife-heroine.

Beatrice Kennet's story was inimitable Kennet—brilliantly satirical. No clue there. But a smile slid into Timothy's eyes as he read the manuscript marked Patricia Walonska. The story was very Parisian, more reminiscent of the warm plush of a cocotte's boudoir than the cold alabaster of Cheney mansions.

The smile moved to Timothy's lips as he glanced at the tough ringside vernacular of Gilda Dawn's offering. He actually laughed when he turned to the ingenuous Susan Hobart's manuscript. The little multimillionairess had submitted a horror tale concerning a ghost ship. It was superbly written, as were the stories of her companions. But it also struck a chord in Timothy's memory.

Even more reminiscent was the manuscript which Derek Muir claimed had been rejected by Mrs. Van Heuten.

For a moment Timothy sat still. One half-forgotten fact had risen in his mind. The day before, Dane Tolfrey had telephoned to North American University. And the four women had all shown uneasiness when he mentioned North American University.

Timothy crossed to the telephone and dialed American 2-7223.

"If I wanted some manuscripts typed in a terrific hurry at night," he asked, "what would I do?"

"One moment," replied the voice, "and I'll connect you with the Students' Typing Agency."

Timothy grinned. When at length a second brisk voice replied, he asked, "Did a Mr. Dane Tolfrey call you last night to type five stories for him?"

"Why, yes. We were able to deliver the stories within two hours, as requested."

"Excellent. And he asked you to send four of them to the Princess Walonska and one to a Mr. Derek Muir?"

"That is correct. They were to be marked with the students' names—for some test, I believe."

"Exactly," said Timothy. "Wasn't the manuscript marked Walonska a de Maupassant story? The Gilda Dawn, a Ring Lardner? And Susan Hobarts, *The Upper Berth,* by Marion Crawford? Muir got the pick of the bunch—*Bliss,* by Katharine Mansfield?"

"I'd have to check the record," said the voice crisply. "Mr. Tolfrey requested one story by Beatrice Kennet; the others we were to select from an anthology. If you'd wait a moment."

"It doesn't matter," said Timothy and hung up.

He was smiling triumphantly. Now that the flimsy alibi of the stories had collapsed, he felt sure of his ground. He had a shrewd idea why, having heard of Mrs. Van Heuten's murder, Dane Tolfrey had gone to such pains to supply her visitors

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with manuscripts. No wonder he had been desperately anxious to keep the real object of their visits from the prying eyes of the police.

Timothy picked up the telephone and called the Chief. "Listen, sir," he said quickly. "I think I know what Mrs. Van Heuten's racket was —and who murdered her."

With anyone but Trant the Chief would have remained stonily unimpressed. As it was, he merely asked if the young detective thought he he had enough proof to satisfy the D.A.

"That's the hell of it, sir," replied Timothy. "I've practically nothing but a hunch—no tangible evidence. It's one of those cases where you have to prove someone knew something or felt something at a given moment, and that's what made him or her do what he or she did, if you get me."

"Most lucid," said the Chief ironically. "And this fellow tonight—Tolfrey? Jervis thinks he was killed by the same person."

"I'm sure of that, too."

There was a pause at the other end, then Timothy heard the Chief's voice again. "Well, as an armchair critic, let me ask two things: What was Tolfrey's theory? And why, if it was right, did he let the murderer into his apartment?"

"I can make a stab at an answer, sir," said Timothy. "Tolfrey's theory was most certainly based on the fact that he knew of someone, apart from himself, who was aware of the existence of the Advice Bureau's back entrance. He picked the right suspect, which was just too bad for him. When the murderer deliberately came early for the party, Tolfrey opened the door probably because he thought it would be awfully cute to meet a murderer face to face. It was as cockeyed as that."

"Whew!" exclaimed the Chief. "Why not name names?"

"I daren't yet, sir." Timothy's voice was very earnest. "I'm working for a breakdown. There's just a chance."

Swiftly he outlined his scheme. He wanted Miss Price and the eight remaining visitors at the offices of the Advice Bureau the following morning. He was planning to reenact the afternoon of the murder—in reverse.

"If I'm wrong, sir," he concluded, "well, there'll be more mud slung at us then they dredge out of the Hudson in fifty years. But can I go ahead?"

"Have a shot at it, Trant," said the Chief quietly. "But after what you've said, neither the D.A. nor I will accept any evidence but a signed confession."

"I'll work for a confession," said Timothy. "And with any luck I'll end up with—eight."

By ten o'clock next morning all of Timothy's arrangements were complete. Madeleine Price and the eight surviving visitors to Mrs. Van Heuten had gathered in the outer

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office of the Literary Advice Bureau; there was a policeman outside each of the two exits.

In the outer office the atmosphere was taut. The four ladies and John Hobart made no pretense at hiding their anxiety; even Derek Muir's blasé poise had wilted; while Robert Bristol's nervousness seemed due less to the occasion than to the presence of his wife. Madeleine Price alone looked calm and self-possessed.

Timothy's eyes were ominously casual as they moved around the tense circle of faces in front of him. "The day before yesterday," he began, "Mrs. Van Heuten had nine visitors. One of them came back later and murdered her. Last night that same visitor paid a call on Mr. Tolfrey before the rest of us arrived. Tolfrey's death was the natural consequence of Mrs. Van Heuten's, and today I want to show, if possible, the circumstances which led up to the first murder.

"All of you have given me a reason why you came to this office that afternoon. Almost all of you were lying. I'm hoping now you will realize there is no further point in concealing the truth, and I can assure you that only those facts which have a direct bearing on the murder need ever be made public."

He held up Madeleine's typed list of visitors. "I am going to take this in reverse," he said. "You four ladies were the last to see Mrs. Van Heuten, so I'll begin with you."

Pale and silent, the four women followed him into the inner office.

Timothy glanced from one to the other of those lovely, masklike faces. "Well, ladies, I'm afraid you will have to explain why you visited Mrs. Van Heuten that afternoon armed with four revolvers. Of course, if the manuscripts you were kind enough to lend me had been genuine, you might claim you intended to extract literary advice from her at the point of a gun."

He shook his head sadly. "But the manuscripts came from North American University."

Patricia Walonska moistened her lips. "Before we make any statement, Mr. Trant, we would prefer to hear what you have to say."

"All right. I think it's easiest to begin with a reconstructed portrait of the late and singularly unlamented Clara herself. It was you, Princess, who first gave me the clue to her real character by your brilliantly cryptic remark that Mrs. Van Heuten's respectability was her major asset. My problem was to discover just how she could have exploited that respectability to the extent of an estate valued at over $250,000. It was clear from the beginning that the Literary Advice Bureau itself could not account for her prosperity, even though, catering as it did to the artistic vanities of the idle rich, it was the ideal means of making contact with—exploitable people."

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A faint ripple of uneasiness stirred the ladies' composure.

"I had very little to go on," admitted Timothy. "That three-hundred and fifty-dollar check which Mrs. Van Heuten wrote for the late and equally unlamented Tolfrey hinted that there was some business connection between the two of them. And when I discovered that Mrs. Van Heuten's alcholic best friend had got in touch with most of you visitors after the murder, I realized he was the bridging factor in the respectability racket."

"Disarmingly logical." The Lotus Lady's lashes flickered over her eyes.

"I was puzzled," continued Timothy, "by a man who could be acquainted with such widely different types as the socially prominent Princess Walonska and the impecunious Derek Muir. That is, I was puzzled until I realized there were two sets of people involved—Clara Van Heuten's wealthy, respectable friends and Dane Tolfrey's not so wealthy and not so respectable protégés. Only gradually did it occur to me that a great deal of money could have been made by bringing those two groups of people together.

"The missing link presented itself when I obtained knowledge of two other of Tolfrey's friends—Mr. John Hobart, the polo player, and Prince Nicolas Walonski. Now, do you ladies feel like confiding in me?"

Beatrice Kennet's jaw dropped. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Go on," breathed Patricia Walonska.

"I want you," went on Timothy slowly, "to listen to a little imaginary story. The scene is, say, some Parisian bar. Dane Tolfrey is there, drinking. So is another man—a man who turns out to be the distinguished exile, Prince Nicolas Walonski."

The tips of Patricia Walonska's fingernails had gone very white.

"Quite disinterestedly, of course," continued Timothy, "Tolfrey hints that the Prince was born for better things than a life of frugality on the Boulevards. He suggests America. In fact, he probably offers to lend the passage money. The Prince is naturally delighted, and eventually the two men set sail for New York.

"The Prince, being unmarried, is eager to meet charming ladies. Mr. Tolfrey knows the ideal hostess for a visiting prince, a woman who moves in the highest social circles. Mrs. Van Heuten invites the Prince Walonski to dinner.

"By this time, the Prince is in need of ready cash. Mrs. Van Heuten is only too glad to help him out. Why don't they make a little informal agreement? The Prince could reimburse her with—er—a small percentage of any windfall he should acquire while under Clara's wing.

"I can imagine Mrs. Van Heu-

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ten outlining her schemes for the Prince's entertainment in New York. Clara is an excellent judge of human nature. She makes a mental survey of all her friends. She goes to the telephone. One can hear her voice: 'Patricia, my dear, you *must* come to dinner on Saturday. Just an informal little party. The Prince is here, you know . . . Yes, my dear, the Prince Walonski.' "

The Princess raised a hand.

"You'd better let me finish," said Timothy. "Miss Cheney accepts the invitation. Why not? The dinner is a big success; the Prince is delightful. After dinner, strangely enough, Patricia Cheney and the Prince are left alone together. What more natural than that a romance should be blossom? What more natural than that two such obviously well-suited people should have been brought together by the respectable and socially prominent Clara Van Heuten? What more natural than that after the wedding Mrs. Van Heuten should tactfully remind the Prince of their little financial agreement?"

"There's no need to go on, Mr. Trant." The Princess inclined her head with superb dignity. "It was a very cruel and unscrupulous business—a one-sided and extremely profitable matrimonial bureau. All four of us were foolish enough to get caught."

"Not foolish," said Timothy quietly, "just unlucky. In her way, Mrs. Van Heuten must have been a genius." His gaze moved to the Princess' companions. "And it's easy to see from the other friends she exploited that she went after only the highest stakes."

"It's also easy to see," put in Beatrice Kennet calmly, "why we four foolish—er—virgins haven't been exactly eager to cooperate, Mr. Trant. After all, no woman likes to admit she's been a bartered bride."

"And no woman likes to be made a bartered bride." Timothy's eyes were very serious. "As a human being, I'd have got up and cheered if you'd murdered Mrs. Van Heuten and Tolfrey for pulling such a thoroughly low-down trick. But I'm also a policeman. You four ladies had opportunity to commit both crimes—and motive."

"But we did nothing more criminal than demand our rights," murmured the Lotus Lady.

"It was my suggestion," said Patricia Walonska, "and it was I who first found out what Mrs. Van Heuten had been doing. I had been married about three months when my husband suggested our buying his old family estate in Central Europe. As Nicolas had no money of his own, I credited him with a certain sum which he said would cover all expenses.

"It was almost amusing. After he had sailed, I thought I would give him a surprise and arrange personally for the place to be modernized. I put the matter in the hands of an agent. He told me the estate was

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worth only half of what Nicolas had asked me to pay."

"And you guessed that Mrs. Van Heuten had pocketed the rest?"

"I had no proof, of course," replied the Princess. "Clara was far too clever for that. And I had no proof that these ladies had been treated in the same way. But I knew they had met their husbands at Mrs. Van Heuten's. I—I put a private detective agency to work, and when I found out enough to be certain, I urged them all to come and stay with me. I explained the—the embarrassing situation and . . ."

"I'd already sensed something was wrong with my delightful husband," offered Gilda Dawn serenely. "When we were still on our honeymoon, he tried to get $100,000 out of me to back him in some London theatrical venture."

"I was the dumb one," confessed Beatrice Kennet. "When I put up $30,000 for my husband to unearth Tahitian shrines, I had no idea half of it was going to enshrine sweet, saintly Clara!"

Timothy's eyes moved inquiringly to Susan Hobart, but she did not speak. Her lips were trembling.

"Naturally," the Princess was saying, "we all decided to divorce our husbands. We also decided that we would have to take some concerted action to stop Mrs. Van Heuten. She must have been ruining other lives, too."

"Don't make us sound too noble, Patricia," interpolated Beatrice Kennet. "We went round to the office to fix the old harridan's feet, all right, but principally because we wanted our blood money back."

Timothy repressed a smile.

"With the aid of those revolvers," said the Princess, "we obtained a statement from her which we could have used either in our divorce proceedings or in case we heard of subsequent—activities."

"And you left her alive?"

"Certainly," said Beatrice Kennet. "We left her making arrangements for repayment. We'd have been dumb as hell to kill her before the final settlement. We heard nothing about the murder until Tolfrey called, warned us to expect the police, and told us he was having those inappropriate manuscripts sent over as a blind. Why he wanted to help us we didn't know, but his plan seemed good."

"In helping you—and incidentally Mr. Muir," Timothy explained, "he was covering up his own part in Clara Van Heuten's racket. That would have made unsavory headlines in the newspapers and ruined his chances of getting any more money out of the racket. He got rattled afterward, though, since we were obviously suspecting him, and decided that it was more important to save his skin than his reputation.

"And, since he had a very good clue to the identity of the murderer, he decided to tell all and clear himself. And now"—Timothy looked around him briskly—"just two

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more questions: Miss Dawn, when you left the building that afternoon, did you make some remark about the 'hunted expression in Mrs. Van Heuten's eyes'?"

The Lotus Lady nodded. "I believe I did. Mrs. Van Heuten had been frightened. I hate to see people frightened."

"Excellent." Timothy smiled. "And you, Mrs. Hobart, did you really hear that noise behind the screen?"

She nodded vigorously. "Yeth, a thcuffling just after we'd come in."

Timothy rose. "Well, ladies, this has been a miserable business for you, but rest assured it will never come out if I can help it." His eyes twinkled. "That is, provided you really did not murder Mrs. Van Heuten."

Derek Muir was the next visitor to be interviewed. That handsome young man strolled to the desk. "I still fail to see," he drawled, "why you should be interested in me. As I explained once before, I knew Mrs. Van Heuten for a mere couple of minutes. It would take a lurid imagination to suspect me of murdering her, even if I did misinform you as to the object of my visit here."

"Then you admit you lied?"

"Why not? Mr. Tolfrey sent me $250 on the understanding I would pretend to be a writer. But now that the unfortunate Dane is no more, I have nothing to lose by telling the truth."

"How cooperative you are, Mr. Muir."

"Improbable as it sounds," sighed Muir, "I am a model citizen at bottom. Here is my little saga: at a recent and singularly impoverished phase of my life I met Tolfrey, who hinted that the Van Heuten woman could help me if I was discreet and could talk like a writer. I was intrigued and mystified. Full of vague hopes, I came to see Clara.

"Despite the crypticality of her remarks, I smelled a decidedly unpleasant—er—rat. But, fortunately, I did not appear to be her type, and she rejected me. I departed, disillusioned, mystified, but still—uncontaminated. That's all I know of Clara."

"And Tolfrey called you that night after the murder?"

Muir nodded. "He was very upset. He urged upon me the need for discretion, the manuscript from North American University, and that very welcome $250."

"Did Tolfrey ask anything else?"

"Only if I knew of any other people who'd visited the Advice Bureau that afternoon. I told him about Gilda and the girl friends."

"You did?" Timothy's voice was excited. "And you're still sure you heard her 'hunted eyes' remark?"

"Of course."

After Muir's departure Timothy sent for John Hobart. The bronzed polo player swung into the room

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with a defiant swagger, only to turn as Susan Hobart hurried in after him and gripped his arm. The young man's eyes, usually so insolent, softened with tenderness as he gazed down at the fragile flower of his wife's face.

"John has told me everything," exclaimed Susan Hobart with surprising stanchness. "Mayn't I stay, pleath?"

Timothy nodded assent.

"I know what you think of me, Trant," broke in Hobart hotly. "Just one of Clara's matrimonial gigolos. Well, I don't blame you. Unfortunately, I have to confess I was more fool than knave over the whole affair."

Timothy watched him intently. "You mean, Mrs. Van Heuten and Tolfrey veiled their proposition so tactfully you didn't get the point?"

"Exactly." Hobart's smile was bitter. "It started last year when the papers hinted that lack of funds prevented my going with the Tetley polo team to England. Tolfrey appeared and took me around to Clara's for dinner. She was sympathetic, made vague remarks about agreements and percentages. Before I knew where I was at, I was constantly meeting Susan there." He thrust his strong jaw forward. "And after I'd met her, I forgot everything in the world but Susan."

"I thwear he didn't even know I was rich, Mr. Trant," put in the little multimillionairess, with an adoring look at her husband.

"I guess love is blind." Hobart's lips twisted. "I didn't wake up until after the wedding, when I received such a sweet letter from Clara, enclosing an estimate from Tolfrey's financial agency which told me exactly how much twenty per cent of Susan's income would be."

"But he refuthed to pay," broke in Susan.

"I did." Hobart's eyes fixed Timothy's steadily. "I forget what lies I told you last night about my incognito visit to Clara. I actually came to let her know she could stop sending those poisonous letters. I wasn't scared of her, because I'd decided to tell Susan, anyhow. And I would have done it if the Princess hadn't beaten me to it."

"That's abtholutely true." Susan was nodding her head like a pretty mandarin. "And John'th done wonders as manager of our factory, and he hasn't taken a penny from me—except the stables and ponies, which were a wedding present."

"And he has a perfect alibi for both crimes." Timothy smiled into the girl's determined blue eyes. "So all is for the best for this best of all possible husbands."

"It certainly is," said Susan literally. "I don't care if the Princess does think it's undignified not to get a divorce. I want John, and I don't want to be dignified." Her smile less ingenuous now, stirred

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memories in Timothy. "And I've told John I did something *very* undignified lately."

"Don't confess to anything rash," said Timothy, grinning.

"But I want to," continued the multimillionairess, flushing. "I was *tho* mad when the Princess said John married me on a percentage basis that I decided to get even with him by k-kissing—the very first man I saw. And John knows that it was—well, just nothing compared with him."

"But it must have been nice for the man," murmured Timothy ruefully, as he sent them out to wait with the others.

For a moment Timothy sat alone at the desk, staring gravely at his hands. Then he rose and moved into the outer office.

"By being so frank and cooperative," he said pleasantly, "you've enabled me to let quite a few of you go."

There was a stir, half of uneasiness, half of relief.

"From a noise which Mrs. Hobart heard behind the screen," he continued, "I am pretty sure now that the murderer used the back entrance; that he was waiting in the washroom while the four ladies were with Mrs. Van Heuten; and that he overheard something in their conversation which incited him to the act of murder. On this premise, I can eliminate six of you."

He smiled at the tense group around him.

"First of all, the four ladies. They could not have been in the office and the washroom at the same time. We may also eliminate Mr. Muir, who, luckily for him, overheard a remark of Miss Dawn's as she left this building. He could hardly have been in the street and murdering Mrs. Van Heuten simultaneously. Incidentally, even if he had eavesdropped on her talk with the four ladies, he would not have been incited to murder. Neither would Mr. Hobart, for he already knew of the subject under discussion. Besides, a reputable plane company supports his alibi. Those six people may go now."

As the four women were passing through the door, the Princess suddenly turned and came back. She took Timothy's hand impulsively. "Thank you . . . thank you for everything," she breathed. "I wish I—oh, won't you come to tea some time?"

As if to make up for the anticlimax of her last remark, she swept out of the room with imperious grace . . .

Madeleine Price entered the inner office in answer to Timothy's summons. Her cool gaze settled on his shirt and tie, which that morning were an inoffensive gray.

"What does today's combination mean?" she asked bluntly.

"Business, Miss Price." Timothy smiled. "While we're on the subject

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of clothes, did I tell you that you can discard that dreadful hat? Mrs. Van Heuten left you $25,000."

The girl's eyes widened in amazement, then a flood of color brought out the latent beauty in her face. "I can't believe it," she murmured brokenly. "And I often felt unkindly about her, said she wasn't generous. Perhaps she guessed how I hated office work, how I loved the country. Perhaps this legacy—"

"Remember," broke in Timothy, "that the legacy also gives you an excellent motive for murder. But we'll talk about that later. At present I want you to get your shorthand pad and to start taking notes the moment I produce a cigarette. Incidentally, the Chief wants a signed confession, so when you type your notes, use the pronoun *I* instead of *You*. With any luck we may get the guilty party to sign it."

"But won't that make me a murderess?" Madeleine's eyes were dreamy now.

"Probably," replied Timothy, with a soft laugh. "Now get the others, please."

This was the moment which Timothy always dreaded in a murder investigation—especially when he had become genuinely interested in the persons involved.

Three of those persons now sat in front of him. Madeleine Price, shorthand pad on knee, had lost her transient beauty and was gaunt with anxiety. Robert Bristol bit nervously at the skin around his nails. His wife was cloaking marked jitteriness beneath the ostentatious nonchalance of her pose.

"Well," began Timothy slowly, "my requirements for the murderer still stand, but I'm going to add two others which—I regret to say—eliminate Miss Price."

"In other words, the Bristols are the sole surviving suspects," explained Helen tartly. "Husband and wife united!"

"Exactly." Timothy's eyes were steady. "I can eliminate Miss Price for the very good reason that the real murderer threatened her over the phone. He or she warned her not to mention Tolfrey's visit through the back door. Later he killed Tolfrey because he knew Tolfrey's 'ludicrously simple' solution could not fail to prove one thing—that the murderer was aware of the back door's existence."

Timothy looked at the two Bristols intently. "I suppose neither of you will admit to knowing about that entrance behind the screen?"

"Certainly not," snapped Helen.

Bobby shook his head vaguely, his restless hands twisting the ends of his tie.

"That's a pity," said Timothy slowly, "because one of you is lying. And the one who is lying is the murderer. Unless my calculations are all wrong, the murderer was actually here in this room

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when Tolfrey came in through that back door on the afternoon of the crime."

He pointed to the screened entrance. "That is why he was so frightened of Tolfrey—that is why he had to kill him. And that is why he might have murdered Miss Price, too, if she had known enough to put two and two together."

"You're crazy," murmured Bristol almost mechanically.

Helen threw out her chin determinedly. "How do you expect to prove that?"

"By a little arithmetical sum, Mrs. Bristol." Timothy returned her steady gaze. "Obviously, Tolfrey invited to his 'solve-the-murder party' only those people whom he knew to have visited the Advice Bureau on the afternoon of the first murder. He knew Muir had come, because he, himself, had sent him; and Muir told him of the four women's visit.

"Tolfrey didn't invite one of you. But he did send his telegram to the other—the murderer. Now, no one had told him of the murderer's visit and it wasn't in the papers. There was only one way by which Tolfrey could have known the murderer had been here—and that was by *seeing* him here himself."

Helen Bristol's frosty eyes flashed. "Neither I nor Bobby had any real motive for murdering Mrs. Van Heuten."

"You're right," said Timothy gravely, "and that's the supremely ironical point to these supremely illogical murders. There weren't any real motives involved. Tolfrey was as shady an individual as they come; he might easily have been murdered for half a dozen different reasons. but he managed to get himself killed just by stumbling through a door at the wrong moment.

"And Mrs. Van Heuten's death was the paradox to end all paradoxes. In her time she had given scores of people scores of motives for wanting to slit her respectable throat; but it just happened that she was killed by one of the few people in this world to whom she'd shown a certain amount of disinterested kindness."

Madeleine leaned forward impulsively. "But, Mr. Trant, you haven't told us which of the two Bristols is the murderer."

Timothy shrugged. "I should have thought that was pretty obvious." His eyes moved almost sadly to Robert Bristol. "Don't you agree with me, Bobby?"

No spark of interest kindled the blank mask of the young author's face. Very deliliberately Timothy turned to Madeleine and produced a cigarette. Recognizing the signal, the secretary lifted her pencil, ready to write.

"So you're accusing Bobby," cut in Helen Bristol abruptly. "You know that's absurd. When Bobby left me at Salter's that afternoon,

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he had no motive for killing Mrs. Van Heuten. And even if he had seen Tolfrey come in from behind the screen—as a regular client of the bureau, he'd have had no motive for using the back door."

"You're only half right, Mrs. Bristol," murmured Timothy. "Your husband *did* have a motive for using the back door that afternoon." His gaze shifted to Bobby. "A wounded beast avoids all eyes, Bobby, and you'd been wounded badly. After your first visit to Mrs. Van Heuten you went to Salter's and were told that your novel had been turned down by the man who'd taken your wife.

"Instinctively, you wanted comfort; instinctively, you turned again to your friend, Clara Van Heuten. But you didn't feel like facing the other clients in the waiting room. Probably you remembered how you'd seen Dane Tolfrey coming in from behind the screen earlier in the afternoon. That back door would have been inviting, and it's not hard to find from outside, once you know of its existence. You slipped into the washroom; you heard voices from Mrs. Van Heuten's office; you waited, listening."

"But, Mr. Trant," broke in Madeleine surprisingly, "I don't know what Mrs. Van Heuten and the four ladies talked about, but it couldn't have concerned Mr. Bristol."

"I agree," said Timothy. "It didn't concern him, but everything had conspired to make him think it did. Imagine him there in the washroom. The wall is thin; he can't help eavesdropping. To his utter surprise he hears the Princess accusing his wonderful 'friend' of something almost akin to white-slave traffic.

"At first he is just disgusted, disillusioned. Then gradually he begins to remember how that very day the wife whom he still adores has asked for a divorce to marry a man presumably richer and more successful than himself.

"Suddenly, a dreadful suspicion enters his mind. Was it possible that Clara had arranged his marriage with Helen on a percentage basis? He, Bobby Bristol, had once had great financial expectations. Could the girl he loved have been nothing but a cheap gold-digger? Could Mrs. Van Heuten have been a mere . . . ?"

"That's a lie!" cut in Helen savagely. "I don't know what you're talking about. But I had nothing to do with Mrs. Van Heuten or . . ."

"Of course you hadn't, Mrs. Bristol," agreed Timothy. "Mrs. Van Heuten would have been shrewd enough to realize her racket worked only with male proteges. Poor girls can land rich husbands without having to give a rake-off to the Claras of this world.

"But don't you see how logical it was for Bobby to think that way? Remember, he was in a highly emotional state before he arrived at the

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Bureau. This shock would have been enough to make any man see red—particularly a man who was very much in love.

"He didn't stop to reason; all he could think of was his own conviction that his so-called best friend had cheated and fooled him in the vilest possible way; that she had contaminated the girl whom he idealized. Don't you see how he would have loathed that falsely benign, white-haired woman who had given him smug literary advice only to . . ."

"Stop!" The word came in a strangled sob from Bobby, but Timothy carried on relentlessly.

"At last the Princess and her friends leave. Bobby knows Mrs. Van Heuten is there in the office alone. He bursts through the door, sees the paper knife gleaming on the desk. Almost before he realizes what he is doing, he picks it up; he stabs and stabs . . ."

Robert Bristol had sprung to his feet, his face ashen pale, his eyes glazing with fury. "But it's lies—lies! You can't prove it! Why, I—I never even knew Mrs. Van Heuten ran any kind of racket!"

"That," said Timothy with steely calm, "you have disproved by your own written statement."

From his pocket he produced the letter he had taken from Helen, the letter which Bobby had writen about the divorce.

"In this rather violent note to your wife, Bobby, you used the following phrase: *'It's better to be like me, unsuccessful in selling my novels, than to be like you, successful in selling yourself.'* I think that shows very clearly that you *did* know about Mrs. Van Heuten's racket and that you *did* think your wife was involved. There is only one way in which you could have come to that conclusion—by listening in the washroom while the Princess and her friends were here in this office."

In the tense silence that followed, Timothy nodded toward Madeleine Price, whose pencil was moving swiftly over her shorthand pad. "When Miss Price has typed up these notes, Bobby, perhaps you would sign them. After all, there is a great deal of—er—influence involved in this case; things will be made far easier for you in the long run if you make a confession."

Robert Bristol stood absolutely still, the veins in his neck pulsing livid against his pale skin. "You're really rather clever, Trant." The self-mocking tone had slipped back into his voice. "You summed me up pretty well, didn't you? Both murders were bungled, and you sensed I had a talent for bungling. Well, I don't regret having killed those two particularly unpleasant people. There's only one thing for which I can never forgive myself."

He made a tentative, rather forlorn gesture toward his wife. "What can I say, Helen? It was disgusting of me to suspect that you

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could be mixed up in that foul matrimonial racket. I'm—I'm frightfully sorry. I guess I'm just a devious, suspicious person; that's all. No wonder you couldn't stand living with me any longer."

Helen Bristol did not reply. That blunt, materialistic young woman had turned her head away to hide the tears in her eyes.

Once again, Timothy nodded toward Madeleine. "The confession, Bobby."

"Confession!" Bristol swung round with a harsh laugh. "Your whole case rests on that, doesn't it, Trant? You're relying on the meek, inconspicuous Bobby Bristol being prepared to sign his life away with a meek, inconspicuous gesture of the pen. Well, that's where your psychology falls down . . ."

Like lightning he sprang forward, flung open the door to the washroom, and slammed it shut, clicking the lock behind him.

"He's—" began Madeleine Price.

"There's a plainclothes man on the fire tower." Timothy's voice was very quiet and weary. "He'll bring him in soon."

Helen Bristol had half risen from her chair. The green eyes were fixed on the washroom door; her fingers twisted a little white handkerchief.

"Poor Bobby," she whispered. "It's—oh, it's so beastly."

"Very beastly, Mrs. Bristol. Very unkind and very sad." Timothy moved to the desk and lit a cigarette shakily. "But if someone had to murder Clara Van Heuten, perhaps he was the one who stood to lose the least. After all, life didn't hold out much for him. His novels weren't acceptable; his money was gone; and the wife he loved—didn't want him . . ."

He broke off as the door from the washroom was hurled open again. The plainclothes man dashed in, his face white.

"He got away?" asked Timothy sharply.

"He'd—before I could get him, he'd done it. Jumped—fell into the courtyard . . . five floors down."

"Dead?"

The man nodded. "And you said the Chief was set on getting a confession."

Very slowly Timothy stubbed his cigarette. "I'm sorry it had to happen this way." His tone became a little too crisp, too official. "Luckily, for the sake of the police force, suicide is considered as good as a confession."

Both Helen and Madeleine knew that he really meant it was far better. And they agreed with him . . .

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newest police procedural story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LAWRENCE TREAT**

TITLE: ***H As in Holdup***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVES: Mitch Taylor and the Homicide Squad

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The way Mitch put it, the Homicide Squad was the guardian angel of all the neckers in town—which, come to think of it, sure was an odd function for any harassed Homicide Squad . . .*

THE HOMICIDE SQUAD WAS having it easy that spring. They handled all crimes of violence out here, and for a while the robberies were run-of-the-mill and stayed off the front page. The only real homicide case they had was that barroom brawl where everybody saw who done it and told the cops right off. Then the warm weather set in and this guy they got to call Tiny Tim showed up.

They called him that on account people said he was big—say, eight or ten feet tall, and weighed around a ton. Which, as far as getting the dope from witnesses was concerned, was about par for the course. Anyhow, he specialized in robbing couples that parked where they thought nobody would bother them.

He had a gun and he'd pulled two holdups so far, both of them on those river overlooks, and it seemed like he was in business for the summer. Lieutenant Decker had a policewoman and a detective staked out and he figured it was only a matter of time before they got him. Still, having Tiny Tim around loose was no picnic.

Mitch Taylor, Homicide, wasn't thinking of Tiny Tim that morn-

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ing. About all Mitch had on his mind when he got on the bus was Amy and how she'd been shining all over when she'd kissed him goodbye. And why she'd ever hooked up with a goof like him, he'd never figured out.

Still, here he was, five-nine in height and on the chesty side, what with how his rib cage curved out. Those long lashes of his made his brown eyes look soft, which they were in a way. And at the same time, they weren't.

He got to headquarters at nine. A couple of the gang were in the Squad Room and Mitch said hello and kidded around a little. Some shop talk and who had a chance to win the pennant and whether the mayor was still playing around with that new babe of his. Then the Lieutenant came in and they got down to business.

The Lieutenant was a tall, gray-haired guy with gray eyes and slap-bang energy that never gave out, and he ran his bunch like he owned them. Just tell them what to do. Wrap up a homicide, make an arrest, bring in a punk who was too handy with a switch-blade, get a sample of the moon, report back at five, see you tomorrow.

There wasn't much stuff this morning—nothing to get excited about except that Tiny Tim had been busy last night, and this time he'd made quite a haul. He took a $20,000 necklace from a Mrs. Gwen Curtiss, along with a few odd bucks. She'd put in the complaint at 2 a.m., not much in the way of details, here was the report, and Mitch Taylor could investigate.

Mitch looked it over. Whoever had made it out must have typed with one foot and fallen asleep halfway down the page. And what was more, besides all the bum spelling and the stuff that was left out, you could hardly even read the name and address, with that worn-out typewriter ribbon they'd used. Mitch studied it out and wondered who was pocketing the dough that was supposed to go for new ribbons.

After the briefing was finished and the meeting broke up, Mitch ambled over to the Lieutenant and tapped the report. "This thing don't even say who she was with," Mitch observed. "Think she put her best jewelry on and went necking all by herself?"

"Find out," Decker said, chuckling, "and try to size her up. Twenty grand is a lot of moolah, so the insurance people will probably go to town on this. But there's probably not much we can do except get a description."

"Sure," Mitch said, with a kind of contentment in his soul. Because with the Lieutenant, you never knew if he was going to drive you like he was trying to show up the F.B.I., or if you could just blow dust. And this time it was just dust.

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Mitch got into his squad car, Number Four, and drove up to the Curtiss address on Stowe. The only parking space on the block was in the full sun, so he stopped there and then called the despatcher to say he was leaving the car. He locked it, stepped out, and took a gander at the street.

Nobody around here was suffering, and the Curtiss house—stucco with brown beams showing to make it look English or something—cost maybe around forty grand, say the price of a couple of necklaces. But what the hell—this was a routine investigation, ask the necessaries and then kiss it off. So Mitch walked up the path, rang the bell, and stood there waiting.

The blonde who opened the door was in her late twenties, maybe, and you could tell she'd been chased plenty and usually got caught. But this morning she looked as if she'd been crying. Maybe because she loved that necklace so much.

Mitch said, "Mrs. Curtiss?" She said yes in a low, throaty voice that made him gulp. He said, "I'm Inspector Taylor." He took out his identification and showed it to her.

"Won't you come in?" she said, like she was inviting him to stay for the week-end.

He nodded and went past her into the living room, which Amy would have pulled apart and thrown out all that expensive stuff with the brand-new polish, and made into a place where you could sit down and be comfortable. A guy was standing near a window, a dark, flashy, take-charge guy, and Mitch wondered what he'd been making her cry about.

The guy turned around and said, "Taylor? We never met, but I've heard about you. I'm Slater. From the insurance company."

"Glad to know you," Mitch said. When it came to dough, the insurance people were right on the ball, except you had to watch out for these investigators; they were sometimes a little slippery.

So Mitch turned to the Curtiss dame and said, "I got the report here. It says you were parked at Smith's Point when this guy came along and shoved a gun at you and took a necklace and forty-five dollars. Is that right?"

"Yes. He had a flashlight, and he blinded me with it."

"What did he look like?" Mitch asked.

"She couldn't see," Slater said. "She just told you she was blinded by the light."

"Sure," Mitch said. He took out his pad, and he spoke to the Curtiss female. "How tall would you say he was?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I was too upset to notice, I was afraid he'd shoot, but he just reached through the open window and tore off my necklace."

"Then what?" Mitch asked.

"Then," she said, "I fainted."

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"Who was with you?"

"My husband," she said, like she'd been saving that one up for the knockout. But Mitch rolled with the punch.

"What's his name?" he asked. "Where is he?"

"Edwin Curtiss, and he left town this morning on a business trip. He was angry at me for wearing the necklace and making him park there. It was my idea. He didn't want to. He—" She gulped, caught her breath, and tried to choke back a sob.

"Mrs. Curtiss has had a nasty experience," Slater said, butting in. "The doctor was here earlier and he advised her to rest. I have all the information you want, so you can get it from me."

"Okay," Mitch said. "What did the guy look like?"

Slater gave with a funny kind of laugh and said, "How would I know? I wasn't there."

"She was," Mitch said, and turned to her again. "What did he look like, huh? For instance, was he tall?"

She shook her head and said, "I don't know. I told you—I didn't see him."

Mitch gave her the eye until she started to squirm, and then he said, "Could I use your phone?"

She pointed to the other end of the room and he went there and lifted the thing up and dialed his own number. It was kind of a trick he pulled, sometimes. You stood with your back to whoever it was, but you picked a spot where you could see their reflection in a window or a hunk of glass over a picture. Then you made your call and kept your voice low so it couldn't be heard.

They always figured you'd found out something and were reporting it. And with two people like this, if they'd cooked up a story, they'd grab a chance to get their signals straight. You could tell, every time.

So Mitch called his number and Amy answered, and he spoke in a low voice and kept the phone close to his mouth. He asked Amy what they were having for dinner tonight, and she said it was a surprise and where was he. He told her he was in a joint where they probably owed on the furniture, which was brocaded up like a king getting coronated.

While he talked he could see Slater and the Curtiss female go into a huddle, and Slater was telling her something and she kept nodding her head and looking at Mitch like she was worried. Then she left and went upstairs, and Slater picked up a cigarette box and a lighter and lit up, and moved out of sight.

When Mitch finished up, Slater was sitting in the red chair like it was his favorite spot and he'd rented it for the season.

Mitch asked him about Curtiss, and Slater said the guy went around the country buying up op-

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tions for oil and mineral rights, and if he worked it right he'd start a real estate boom and unload. Sucker stuff, but strictly legal.

Mitch listened, but this was no skin off his nose. All he wanted now was a description of the jewels, and when he got it he blew. He had an idea that as soon as the door closed, this Curtiss dame came flying downstairs. Or maybe Slater went up. Anyhow, Mitch drove back to headquarters and made his report.

"This Slater guy," Mitch told the Lieutenant, "is making a play for her. Maybe he's just stringing her along—she's a nice piece of fluff and her husband's away a lot and Slater maybe sees a chance for himself. On the other hand, it could be *versa vice*. Maybe there never was a robbery and the Curtisses are trying to put something over on the insurance company, and *she's* playing *him*."

"Think she really was with her husband?" Decker asked.

"That's her story, and she was saving it up. There's something fishy about the whole thing, but I want to see Curtiss before I start guessing."

"Well, we'll have to wait for him to get back," Decker said. "Can you tie Tiny Tim into this?"

"Sounds like him," Mitch said, "but there's not much to go on."

A few days later Curtiss showed up at headquarters by request, and then left town again. Mitch wasn't around but the Lieutenant questioned him and gave him a clean bill on the robbery business. Curtiss told the same story as his wife, and you couldn't trip him up.

So nothing in particular was happening, except the Lieutenant was still worried about keeping the city safe for Romeos. The way Mitch put it, the Homicide Squad was their guardian angel and had to make Tiny Tim lay off.

He laid off all right. He picked the wrong guy and got shot. Nobody saw it happen except the couple he must have tried to hold up, and they kept it a secret. Next morning a pair of patrol cops spotted a car in the woods a little off the road, and they investigated. After looking around, they found a big guy with a bullet in his head. A flashlight was alongside him, and he was still holding onto his gun.

The spot was inside the city limits, so the Homicide Squad took over. They didn't know it was Tiny Tim, not yet, but they suspected it was. His driver's license said William Roush and he lived in a rooming house and was wearing an expensive wrist watch. Later on in the day his first hold-up victim identified the watch. So everything was hunky-dory for the neckers again.

It was easy to reconstruct what had happened. The neighborhood was a well-known spooning place, and Tiny Tim must have driven

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out there in the evening and waited for a pair of customers to park and switch off their lights. Then Tiny Tim probably walked over and demanded their cash and valuables. Only this time the driver was armed, and he shot Tiny Tim and beat it.

Like Decker said, the killer could probably have pleaded self-defense and got away with it, but he preferred to vamoose. So, what with Tiny Tim out of the way and nobody crying about it, and with a good chance that it was self-defense, the squad could go a little easy on the case. They didn't expect to crack it, and for once the papers wouldn't be on their necks saying a dangerous killer was loose and that the police were doing nothing about it.

The investigation was thorough enough and the Homicide Squad went into Tiny Tim's background and found he had a record going way back, but the pressure was off. Until the M.E. dug a second bullet out of the corpse and said Tiny Tim had been carrying it around for a few years. Then Jub Freeman, up in the laboratory, said it came from the same gun that had killed him last night.

With that, the Lieutenant ordered all Homicide Squad members to report in the Squad Room immediately. When they were there, he lined things up for them.

"Tiny Tim is William Roush, and he served time for assault and robbery. Five years ago he was shot in the leg, was hospitalized, and refused to tell who'd clipped him.

"Nothing too unusual about that. If Roush had snitched, the snitcheree probably had enough on Roush to send him to jail, too. So we got nowhere, then. But this snitcheree waited five years, and last night he set up a trap and Tiny Tim walked into it. Our job is to backtrack on Tiny Tim and find this guy. Here's what we do."

The Lieutenant handed out the work assignments. Tiny Tim's room, his letters, photographs, all physical evidence. His bank account if he had one, his car purchase and all financial records that could be located. The neighborhood where he lived, visit the bars, speak to everybody who knew him. His prison record and prison contacts, track them down, talk to his parole officer. His women. His family, if any. Trace his movements in detail for the last couple of days. And so on.

It was a tough week for Mitch Taylor. Besides working like a toll collector in the rush hour, he had family worries. Joey, who was six, got to playing detective and imitating his old man. The kid would follow people to make what he called "a rest." After he got lost the first time, Mitch spread the word to the local precinct to watch out for Joey and bring him home whenever they spotted him.

It happened again, twice, so

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Mitch gave the kid a man-to-man talk, how Joey could be a detective when he grew up, but right now he had to stay home and take care of his mother, and he mustn't leave the house. So the next day Joey went up to the roof of the apartment house where they lived. Somebody saw him walking along the edge, six stories up, and Amy almost died before she got there and brought him down.

Joey was proud of the exploit; he said he liked high places, he could see a lot. Mitch and Amy decided not to bawl the kid out, they'd only scare him. He was better off keeping his nerve, only Amy would have to watch him like a hawk. Which was tough on her and maybe why she burned that rhubarb pie, which was Mitch's favorite.

Then one evening she had a funny story. "A man came here today," she said, "and he told me he was doing research on housewives and he wanted to know how I spent my day and when I went out and if it was at regular times, and so on. He asked me so many questions."

"Did he have any identification?" Mitch asked.

"No. He said he usually did but he'd mislaid it, and he gave me a peculiar look. As if he wanted me to be suspicious. As if he wanted to scare me."

"Look, honey, if he comes around again, call the cops."

"He won't come back," Amy said with positiveness. "Whatever he wanted to know, he found out."

"Daddy," Joey said, jumping up and down. "Can I make him a rest?"

"Who?" Mitch asked.

"The bad man."

"Where is he?" Mitch asked. "Did you follow him?"

"He went up," Joey said. And more than that Mitch couldn't get out of the kid. So what do you do, huh?

Down at the Homicide Squad, however, things were moving along. The picture of a man named Andy Jones began to emerge. He'd been a pal of Tiny Tim's at one time. Andy was one of those guys you can never get a description of that amounts to anything, but he was smart, and he liked women and fancy jewelry and fast cars. He was either in the big money or else he was broke, but nobody knew exactly what he did. He was everything, he was nothing. He favored blondes, and he'd had one in particular for quite a while. A couple of people thought he'd been married to her. But who he was and where he was, the Homicide Squad couldn't find out.

At the back of his mind Mitch was still wondering about the Curtiss female and why she'd run out on him that morning. And why she'd been crying. And whether a

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dame like her would faint just because Tiny Tim grabbed her necklace, and whether she'd really had a doctor the next morning.

And seeing as how Mitch was the only one who'd questioned her, he figured he ought to talk to her again. So he kept dropping in whenever he was near Stowe, but without much luck.

It must have been the fourth time he tried that the garage door was open and he saw the low-slung, red sports car. And make believe that didn't give Mitch a couple of ideas.

She was home this time and she acted kind of nervous, but who wouldn't be when a homicide dick keeps coming around? Mitch told himself that if she'd dyed her hair and kept the garage door closed, maybe he never would have caught on.

He sat down in the same chair that Slater the insurance guy liked so much, and the cigarette box was there and Mitch slid it over. While he didn't smoke, he wanted to see the initials on it. They were the curlicue kind that nobody can read, but if you decided the letters were G.J., you could make them out.

He sparred around a while and asked her about her husband and whether she'd collected for the necklace yet, and he had her up in the air and hanging by her teeth before he shot the real question.

"When did your husband change his name?" he asked.

She popped up like she'd been goosed, and she dug her fingernails into her palms before she managed to answer. "He never did."

"Changed it from Andy Jones," Mitch remarked.

"Oh!" she said. "He—" Then she caught herself and said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Mitch figured she wasn't too bright. "Just tell me," he said. "He's in a little trouble, and you want to be on the right side of the fence, don't you?"

When she didn't say anything, Mitch went on. "It's easy to find out," he said. "All I got to do is check up on the marriage license. Nothing to it."

"I married Ed two years ago," she said. "Ed Curtiss."

"And what about this?" Mitch said, tapping the cigarette box. "G.J.—Gwen Jones."

"Johnson," she said. "That was my name before I got married."

Maybe, Mitch thought, and maybe not; but he didn't push it. The thing was, he had a lead on Andy Jones and the next move was hers, so let her think he knew a lot more than he actually did.

He stood up. "I'll find out," he said. "I have a couple more questions, but they can wait. I'll be seeing you." And he started to go.

Her voice, sharp and panicky,

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made him swing around. "Please!" she said.

She was standing there with her arms at her sides and her palms turned out, like she didn't know what to do with her hands. "What kind of trouble is he in?" she said.

"Ask him," Mitch said. "Where is he, anyhow? Upstairs?"

The question was way off. Instead of scaring her, it made her wonder what Mitch was talking about. He figured he should have shut up and that he wasn't likely to get any further, so he just turned around and went out. And walked down the street. And around the corner. And then doubled back through somebody's back yard and slipped into his squad car, which was unmarked. He kept his head down so she couldn't see him.

He could tell by the roar of the motor when the red sports car came scooting out of the garage. It went east, and he turned on the ignition and followed. He could see the red job a couple of blocks away, and he stayed far enough back so she couldn't possibly spot him.

At the traffic circle she'd either go downtown, or else she'd take Lincoln and follow it as far as Lanier. And if she did neither, then she was playing rings around him and he'd messed this up and the Lieutenant would say so, with embellishments.

She took Lincoln.

The way she'd parked the red sports car on Lanier, she could have got a ticket. But she was jittery and hardly knew what she was doing. She wanted help and to be told what to do.

Mitch parked out of sight, and while he was waiting there he called headquarters and asked them to check with the Marriage Bureau, just in case. Andrew Jones and Gwendolyn somebody, date unknown. It took about a half hour before they called him back and said there was no such record.

Mitch wasn't disturbed. Maybe she'd been married to Andy Jones and maybe not, but she certainly knew him. And she was in that white-brick apartment house and repeating what Mitch had said. Which was fine, because once he tied her up with Jones, the rest would be easy.

So Mitch sat in his car and thought about Amy and then about Joey and then about nothing in particular. And then he got practically an inspiration.

Another half hour or so went by before Gwen came out and got into the red car and drove off. Mitch went to the apartment house and looked through the names in the lobby and found Slater. He lived in 3-C, and Mitch pushed the button. The buzzer answered and he opened the main door and went up.

Slater was waiting. Mitch stepped past him and into a comfortably furnished room that had

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color TV and a good hi-fi system. Slater closed the door.

"Hi, Andy," Mitch said. That was the inspiration.

Slater smiled. "I've been expecting you," he said. He brought the gun out in a quick, expert motion. "Put your hands up and turn around," Slater said.

Mitch obeyed. Slater said, "Now take your jacket off, slowly."

Mitch took it off. He didn't think he was going to get shot. Not by a guy like Slater, who was familiar with police work and knew Mitch must have reported where he was. Still, Mitch shouldn't have come here alone, and he was in one hell of a mess and didn't know how he was going to get out of it.

Slater moved in, took hold off the holster strap, and yanked it off. The holstered gun dropped to the floor and Slater picked it up. When he told Mitch to turn around again, Slater was relaxed in the easy chair and smiling. He had both guns.

"Sit down," he said, "and take a load off your feet."

"Sure," Mitch said. "Just so you don't do anything stupid."

"I never do," Slater said. "That's the point. I've been worried about the way you people were closing in on me, but I figured I was all right as long as nobody pumped Gwen. Then you had to stick your nose in."

"You sure you want to tell me all this?" Mitch said. "Maybe we'd both be better off if we called it quits."

Slater shook his head. "Too late for that. My best bet is to give it to you straight, and then make a deal."

Mitch felt a little better. If he stalled along for a while, he might get out of this mess. And as soon as he was clear of it, he'd tell the Lieutenant, including any deal Mitch had to make. So he said, "Well, maybe."

"In the old days," Slater said, "Roush and I pulled quite a few jobs together."

Mitch nodded. "Until you had an argument and shot him."

"That's right," Slater said. "We split up after that and I started a new life. No more Jones. Instead, Slater, insurance investigator, with a clean bill."

"But you kept up with Gwen," Mitch said.

"The hell I did. I walked out on her and never expected to see her again. Or Roush, either. I thought he was still a guest of the state, or I'd never have come near this town."

"They let 'em out too easy," Mitch said.

"I met him in a bar," Slater said, "and he tried to put the bite on me. I saw I had to cut him down before he opened that big mouth of his."

"And what about Gwen?" Mitch asked.

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"Part of my job is to spot phony claims. You learn to smell 'em, and when I got one from a Mrs. Edward Curtiss about a stolen necklace, I went to see her. It was Gwen and the claim was as phony as they come. It was a necklace I'd given her, and she'd kept it all these years. It cost two grand, but I'd manufactured a bill for twenty, and that's what she'd insured it for."

"So you arranged a fake robbery," Mitch said. "Right?"

"I didn't fake anything," Slater said angrily. "I told Gwen to wear the necklace and park at Smith's Point. I stuck them up and there was no kidding about it, either. Curtiss wasn't in on it and doesn't know yet that there's a big insurance claim, which I'm going to collect. And keep. I wanted him to be telling the truth. An insurance company doesn't pay out twenty grand without knowing everything's clean and aboveboard. The robbery had to be genuine, and the police investigation had to be, too."

"So that was it," Mitch said. "Wait for us to tag Roush with your job, and then you'd knock him off. You planned doing that, anyhow. And you might have gotten away with it if I hadn't tumbled to you through Gwen. Now what?"

"Now," Slater said, "we make a deal. I want you to shut up about this for a month, while I collect the twenty grand. If you keep your trap shut that long, you'll have to keep it shut. You can't go and tell that chief of yours that you had the goods on me and let me go. You see that, don't you?"

Mitch nodded. But what made Slater think Mitch would go for the deal?

"All I need is a month," Slater said. "Maybe I'll stick around after that, or maybe I'll cover my tracks and change my name again and go somewhere else. I did it once, I know how. Jones to Slater, then Slater to —" Slater grinned.

"Don't tell me," Mitch said. "Let me guess."

"One month," Slater said. "Naturally, I want to make sure you don't rat on me, so I set things up a week ago. If you arrest me, something's going to happen to your wife. You don't know what and you don't know when, and you can't take a chance that I'm bluffing. But if I'm in jail, it's going to happen. And don't kid yourself—the day I don't tell my boy that everything's okay, he goes to work. He's ready, Taylor. He's ready."

Mitch thought of the guy who had visited Amy, and it seemed pretty clear that Slater had hired him and that this was no bluff. But how do you protect your wife from a hood who has everything fixed and ready to go, as soon as he gets the order?

You don't. You knuckle under.

"One month," Slater said again. "At the end of it all bets are off

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between us. Either I'll be okay, or else I'll be in jail on two murder charges—and you'll have a dead wife."

Mitch didn't say anything. Slater smiled like he knew he'd won and he said, "So you'll report a clean bill for the Curtisses and for me. I think that takes care of everything."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "I guess it does."

"Okay, then. Pick up your gun and get out of here."

Mitch picked it up, slipped the holster strap over his shoulder, and put on his jacket. He kept his eyes on the floor and went out slowly. He slogged along and dragged himself down the stairs. If he told Lieutenant Decker exactly what had happened, then what? And if he didn't—

As Mitch started to cross the street, he tripped on the curb and almost fell. A horn blasted and a car swerved, and Mitch kept on walking.

When he got to his car, the radio was signaling. He climbed inside and stared at the dashboard and listened to the buzzing. After a while he picked up the receiver. He didn't say anything. It took him nearly half a minute to push the "On" button.

"Taylor?" the despatcher said. "What's wrong with you? I been trying to get you for the last hour. Lieutenant Decker wants you. Over."

Mitch sighed and spoke into the instrument. "Taylor, Car Four," he said in a dead voice.

The Lieutenant practically chirped at him. "Taylor, there's some kind of a rumpus at your place. Your kid climbed up to the roof and spotted some guy in an apartment across the courtyard cleaning a rifle. Your wife came up and saw him, too. He'd aim at your window, as if he was practising, and she recognized him as having been around to make some sort of survey. She called us and we went in, and he says he has a right to own a rifle and he never even heard of you or your wife. Know anything about him?"

Mitch knew about him all right, and grinned broadly. "A couple of things," he said. "I'll tell you when I get there."

He could take Slater any time, with a little help. Right now Mitch wondered whether to bring Joey a whole quart of ice cream or the biggest box of candy they made. That kid of his—they didn't come any better.

Then Mitch shook his head and vetoed both ideas. If Joey wanted to be a cop, he ought to learn what you get for it.

Nothing. Practically nothing.

But as Mitch drove on, he felt good—inside, where it counts.

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